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SERMONS

WITHDRAWN

FOR

THE CHILDREN OF MARY

BY

REV. FERDINAND CALLERIO
Canon of the Cathedral of Novara.

Translated from the Italian.

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REVISED BY

REV. RICHARD F. CLARKE, S.J.

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✠ MICHAEL AUGUSTINE,
Archbishop of New York.

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PREFACE.

THE sermons contained in this little volume will be found very suitable for reading out loud to the Children of Mary at their monthly or weekly meetings. In this respect they supply a distinct want. It not unfrequently occurs that the priest is unable to be there, or cannot give an instruction himself, and on such occasions a book is needed from which the president, or some other person present, can read a short and appropriate discourse to those who are gathered together. Such discourses must be concise, practical, devotional, and bearing in some way on the duties and privileges that appertain to the Children of Mary. They must be suited alike to rich and poor, to the educated and the uneducated. They must draw the line with prudence and discretion between any yielding, on the one hand, to the spirit of the world, and any too great severity on the other, in dealing with the innocent, though to some dispositions dangerous, pastimes and amusements generally prevalent in society; they must not sanction anything which has in general a tendency to lower the standard or impair the modesty of the Christian maiden; nor must they condemn any recreation or diversion that is not condemned by the law of God or the authority of the Church.

All these conditions are fulfilled in Canon Callerio's sermons. There are, indeed, some passages which it was necessary to modify, in order to adapt them to the different circumstances of English-speaking countries. What is undesirable in Italy is not always undesirable in

America or England, and the Church adapts her advice as well as her precepts to the character and tone of the country for which she is legislating. This has made a few changes necessary in the translation, in order that the spirit rather than the letter of the prudent counsels laid down should be faithfully reproduced.

The sermons have also been abridged, so as not to occupy more than a few minutes each if they are read aloud. They are edifying and instructive, as well as interesting and well written, and the translator's work has been so faithfully performed that it is difficult to believe that they were not originally written in English.

Every priest may safely recommend them for public or private perusal, and it is to be hoped that they will obtain a wide circulation among the Children of Mary in all English-speaking countries.

R. F. CLARKE, S.J.

ORIGIN OF THE CONGREGATION OR SODALITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

The Congregation or Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary was founded in the year 1563, by Father Vanden Leeuwe, S.J., who taught a class of boys in the Roman College. He erected an altar of Our Lady in one of the class rooms, and assembled the boys belonging to his class around it, to sing hymns in her honor, to offer prayers to her, and to listen to exhortations and to pious reading intended to stimulate their devotion to her, and to set before them the example of her virtues and perfections. After a time the students belonging to the other classes of the college began to imitate the example of Father Vanden Leeuwe's boys. Gradually the devotion spread through the whole college, a regular Congregation was instituted, and its members recited together every week the little office of Our Lady.

The visible effects of this new Congregation on the piety, as well as on the studies of the Roman College, soon led other colleges of the Society of Jesus, both in Rome and elsewhere, to take it up, and in 1584 Father Claudius Acquaviva, the General of the Society, obtained for it the formal sanction of the Roman Pontiff, who canonically established it under the title of the "Prima Primaria," and enriched it with many indulgences and other spiritual privileges. He also gave to the General of the Society the office of Director General, and appointed him the head of all the Congregations affiliated to it. In 1586 Sixtus V. confirmed these favors, gave permission for its extension to all colleges and churches of the Society, and allowed members of both sexes to belong to it.

In an apostolic letter dated May 26, 1824, Leo XII. again confirmed all the privileges hitherto granted to the Congregation, and gave leave for its establishment all over the world in any church, whether under the direction of the Society of Jesus or not, though always under the condition that every such Sodality or Congregation should be affiliated to the "Prima Primaria" at Rome if its members were to share in the indulgences and other privileges with which the Roman Pontiffs have invested it. The indulgences which can be gained by its members are very numerous, and can be applied to the dead as well as to the living.

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SERMONS

FOR THE CHILDREN OF MARY.

SERMON I.

THE CHILD OF MARY.

OF all the religious associations of the present day, that of the Children of Mary is undoubtedly one of the most excellent and the most useful. It may be said, that God has been pleased to bless this pious association in a special manner; for although it was only in the year 1847 that it was definitely established, it spread so fast and so far that now there is hardly a town or village to be found where there is not a goodly band of devout persons who are enrolled in it. In fact, it may be compared to the little fountain seen by Mardochai in his vision (Est. x. 6), which, a mere thread of water at its source, increased in volume so rapidly, as it went on its course, as to become a great river and even overflow its banks.

I heartily congratulate you, my dear children, that in an age so unfavorable as the present to the growth of religion and piety, you have chosen the better part, and have enrolled yourselves in the Confraternity of the Children of Mary. For there is none more dear to the Blessed Virgin than a young girl, who, in the bloom of her youth, dedicates to her every pulsation of her virginal heart, who offers to her the choicest blossoms of virtue

and piety; none is dearer to the Blessed Virgin, and, at the same time, none is a greater source of wonder to the world, than a band of devout damsels who, united together in this holy association, desire to prove themselves true daughters of Mary.

With the object of encouraging those who are already members of this confraternity to persevere, and of exciting in others the wish to join it, I intend, in this first conference, to speak of the origin of the Association of Children of Mary, the advantages it offers, and the obligations it imposes.

May our dear Mother Mary, the Blessed Virgin, under whose special protection we have placed ourselves, suggest to me whatever is most necessary and useful for your souls; may she cause my feeble words to sound in your ears as the exhortation of a loving father, pointing out to an inexperienced but docile child the way wherein she should walk, the dangers she ought to avoid, the duties she has to fulfil.

The twelfth century was marked by the prevalence of vice, and a lamentable indifference to religion; then, as now, the enemies of the faith exerted themselves to the utmost, employed the basest means to disseminate the poison of immorality and unbelief, and to lead the faithful to stray from the paths of virtue and piety. These malignant efforts were principally directed against the young, especially those of the gentler sex; either because their weaker nature rendered them an easier prey, or because the foes of religion knew that if they could succeed in thoroughly corrupting the women, they would have a powerful weapon for the fulfilment of their evil designs. It was then that the Bl. Peter de Honestis, perceiving how urgently necessary it was to defend the young and inexperienced from the contagion of the subtle poison of impiety, established in Ravenna a congregation entitled, "The Sons and Daughters of Mary," the primary object

of which was to guard young girls from the dangers surrounding them, to give them a Christian training, and guide them in the difficult path of virtue. This was the original germ whence sprang the widespread and flourishing institution called the Pious Association of the Children of Mary.

Some centuries later, about the year 1640, a congregation dedicated to Mary Immaculate was established in France by a zealous priest, in the hope of promoting a greater love of God, and a more regular observance of their religious duties among the women of his parish. Others followed his example, with most happy results.

Yet, the times were evil; impiety was on the increase, and the spirit of fervor that animated these associations grew cold. It was, however, revived again in France, in 1847, and afterwards in Italy. The Congregation of the Children of Mary was established anew, on a firm basis, with rules and statutes, and under wise direction it produced abundant fruits of sanctity. Although at the outset they encountered antagonism and opposition; yet, sanctioned and encouraged by the bishops, and enriched with indulgences by the Holy See, these associations spread rapidly, and in time became very popular. Finally, the Congregation of the Children of Mary was approved and erected canonically, as an archconfraternity, by Pope Pius IX., in 1864.

Such, my children, was the origin of this confraternity, instituted for the purpose of inducing you to hold yourselves aloof from idle amusements, to eschew the baneful pleasures the world offers you; of confirming you in piety and purity of life, so that you may at some future time adorn the state, whatever it may be, to which you are called by God; whether, in the character of a faithful wife and tender mother, you preside over a household, —whether it is your lot to serve Our Lord as His loving spouse in the seclusion of the cloister,—or whether you

remain in the world unmarried, giving edification to all around by your exemplary conduct.

Of all the benefits which this association confers on its members the first and foremost is this: if it be true that Mary loves all Christians with maternal affection, there is no doubt that she regards with particular affection those young persons who tread under foot that fatal human respect which is the ruin of so many souls, and who count it a glory to consecrate themselves to her service. If Mary bestows her favors upon all, even upon wanderers from the right way, how much more abundantly will she lavish them on the members of this congregation, who honor her with all their heart. How, indeed, could she do otherwise, since they are her own daughters, whom she has taken under her special protection. Could so tender a mother fail to love her own child? Impossible! she is her delight, the sweetest, the dearest solace of her heart. If the child is in pain, the mother suffers with it, if she is in danger, the mother's anxious heart knows no rest; if she is in affliction the mother shares her grief. And if the child is attacked by sickness, the mother does not leave her bedside; she divines her every wish, and when kindly sleep closes the sufferer's eyes, she bends over her and presses a tearful kiss upon the pale forehead.

The members of this confraternity are all the daughters of Mary; they are consequently certain to find in her an unfailing protectress. Are they assailed by temptation, they have but to exclaim, "Help me, O my Mother!" and forthwith she will obtain for them tranquillity and peace, or give them strength to overcome the tempter. Are they in trouble, they need only turn to Mary, and shed their tears upon her breast, saying, "Help me, O my Mother!" and the thorn that pierces them will cease to wound. Are they uneasy at the remembrance of past sins, they have but to cry, "Help me, O my Mother!"

and they will feel their burdened hearts relieved and their souls filled with joyous hope. Yes, Mary is the true Mother of her children; they may draw near to her trustfully, and invoke her with perfect confidence.

The other advantage is one which cannot be overestimated: it is that of mutual good example, reciprocal encouragement to the practice of virtue and the pursuit of holiness.

This evil world around us, whose spirit is one of hostility to God, is, as may be seen, the battlefield whereon the devil exercises his malignant forces; where he wages war against souls, and lays snares to entrap them, and, as has been already remarked, it is against young women that his efforts are principally directed. He seeks to instil into their hearts the love of display, of idle conversation, of excitement and pleasure, in order to withdraw them from pious practices; and now may be seen the great advantage it is for those whom he would make his victims, to be united together, to form, as it were, a strong army, that they may protect themselves against the attacks of the world and the devil. For, as union is known to be strength, the world, perceiving these maidens bound together closely for mutual defence, will not have the courage to accost them; let them be, it will say, let them be, they are the Children of Mary, it is useless to try and seduce them with our allurements; none of them wants to have anything to do with us. Again, as union is strength, so the young girl who is a Child of Mary, will, when brought face to face with seduction or snares of any kind, remember that she does not stand alone, she is one of a hundred others who are ready to resist similar assaults, and reassured by this thought, she will rise superior to the temptation, and continue to pursue the same regular and devout course of life as before. And, as union is strength, so if a young girl joins the congregation who is yet somewhat timorous and

needs some support and help to walk in the right way, seeing how her companions, disregarding what men may say, boldly face the world, despise its judgments, and make an open profession of religion and the fear of God, she will feel herself encouraged and will follow their generous example.

Nor if she should be overcome by frailty and fears, will she be left to her own resources; she will derive solace and succor from the counsels and instructions given at the meetings of the Children of Mary; she will have around her many kind sisters to help her with advice and persuasions; and the world and the devil will seek in vain to draw her into their net; secure beneath the protection of Mary Immaculate, she will pass safely and serenely through the perils to which her youth and inexperience expose her, and, finally, she will receive the crown of the just as her portion. The annals of this congregation record in their necrology many a fair flower of virtue, many a pattern of sanctity, many an instance of a holy and happy death, such as we all might envy, among the favored Children of Mary.

So numerous and so striking are the fruits of this pious association, that our Holy Father Leo XIII., in an audience granted on April 5, 1888, to the Congregation of the Children of Mary, on the occasion of his sacerdotal jubilee, could not refrain from uttering this encomium: "I have had all manner of proofs of the good that the Confraternity of the Children of Mary is capable of effecting; and I do not hesitate to affirm that the man who instituted it and compiled the rules may be regarded as truly inspired by God."

But if the Child of Mary enjoys special privileges, she has also special duties to perform, and these are none other than those of a good daughter towards a loving mother.

Your first duty, then, is to love the great Queen of

Heaven, to whom you have dedicated yourself by a solemn act. What, I ask, does a good daughter do, who loves her mother fondly? She is most careful not to displease her, she is not only most prompt in obeying her, but she anticipates her wishes and hastens to fulfil them; she is delighted to see her esteemed and honored by others, and if any one affronts or injures her, she is cut to the heart, she is fired with indignation, she feels herself irresistibly urged to repair, if she cannot prevent, the insult, since no one in the whole world is so dear to her as her mother. You must act in a like manner, honoring the Blessed Virgin by your prayers, your good works, and, most of all, by avoiding whatever might be displeasing in you to this loving Mother. And just as that would be an undutiful daughter who, showing no respect for her mother, should, in defiance of her expressed wish, frequent places, houses, the company of persons whom she knows to be undesirable, and cause her mother great grief on account of her caprices, her vanity, her love of dissipation, so you would be undutiful daughters of Mary were you to act towards your celestial Mother in a similar manner.

Moreover, in imitation of the Blessed Virgin, the Child of Mary ought to be a model of every virtue. At home she ought to be docile, affectionate, full of consideration for her parents, gentle towards her brothers and sisters, never showing temper or obstinacy, never answering angrily or in an unbecoming manner, industrious and patient, in short, an angel of peace in the family. And, if occasion requires, she will endeavor, by some well-timed counsel or kindly rebuke, to influence for good an unbelieving father, a brother who neglects religion or has taken to bad ways, a sister who loves the world and its frivolities. She will remain at home as much as possible, shunning the bustle and turmoil of the world, its noisy mirth and public festivities. And if she must of neces-

ity leave her seclusion, she is ever on her guard, dreading danger, especially anything that might wound her modesty, that delicate flower that a touch would wither. She is like the swallow, that never forgets it is a stranger, even in the place where it makes its nest; for the world, the flesh, and the devil resembling three great vultures hungering for their prey, are ever on the alert, hovering near the gentle maiden, ready to snatch her away in their cruel talons and tear her to pieces. She will assist as often as she can at the public services of the parish church, and at the devotions of the confraternity; her demeanor will be recollected in order to inspire others with the love of prayer and respect for the house of God. Above all she will be distinguished by the modesty and simplicity of her dress, her edifying conversation, the discretion displayed in her every action, so that as far as this is possible to frailty of human nature, she will not suffer in herself the shadow of a fault, any more than a clever painter will tolerate in a fine painting a single touch out of keeping with the rest.

And if there should be some poor sick person near, who is all alone or perhaps exposed to unkind treatment, the Child of Mary will frequently visit her, consoling her with kind words, and ministering to her spiritual and physical needs. If there are children who require religious instruction, the Child of Mary will teach them with a mother's care; if there is some young woman who has taken the first step in the path of sin, the Child of Mary will act as a messenger from heaven to set her right, to rescue her from the abyss towards which she is heedlessly hastening. In a word, the life led by the Child of Mary must be a life apart from the vanities and follies that worldlings love, a life devoted to the love and service of the Lord, a life spent in gaining others to His love and faithful service, and in thus spreading around her the sweet odor of Christ.

Alas, how many perils beset a young girl whose lot it is to live in the midst of the corrupt and wicked world! But our confraternity will safeguard her; it is the ark of Noe, wherein the dove finds shelter and safety, when the earth is overwhelmed by the turbid waters of iniquity.

You, who enjoy this blessing, give thanks to God, who put it into your heart to join the pious Association of the Children of Mary, and prove your gratitude by promoting the glory of God, the salvation of souls, and making daily progress in virtue. God grant that you may so act that in the great day of account, the Divine Judge may address to each one of you these consoling words: *Amica mea, spousa mea, veni, coronaberis.* "Come, my love, my spouse, come and receive the crown thou hast merited."

SERMON II.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND HER MISSION.

In our last conference I spoke to you of the origin and history of the Association of the Children of Mary; I expounded the chief duties and the special privileges it offers to young girls who, thoroughly in earnest about their soul's welfare, enroll themselves in it; but I gave only a passing mention to the real object, the aim, or, rather, the mission, of the congregation itself. This mission is so important, that I feel it to be not merely advisable, but necessary, to speak of it more at length; in order that all may know and understand it, both those who are already members, and those who, as yet, have not given in their names to it.

What, then, is the object of the confraternity? It is this: to train our daughters and fit them to accomplish their mission on earth, to fulfil their vocation. A weighty task, indeed, but of what immense practical utility! For, as you know, if a woman performs her duties faithfully, whatever be her state in life, there is no being more noble, more to be admired; she is a source of blessings so inestimable that no words of mine can describe her aright. But if she neglects her duties, there is no being more odious; she is a very demon, who works nothing but mischief in the world.

I ask you, therefore, to listen to me attentively, and—what is of far greater importance—with a steadfast resolution to lay to heart and put in practice what you hear.

What, then, is woman's mission? in other words, why was she created? She was created by God to be the com-

panion of man, to help him to accomplish the end for which he was created. And as the ultimate end for which man was created is to know, love, and serve God on earth and afterwards enjoy His presence in heaven, so woman was created for the same end; and for this besides, that by exercising her influence over the heart of the man, in order to incite him to the practice of virtue and all that is good, she might aid him to attain that end. It is not so much in regard to his temporal existence that woman is commanded to be a helper to man, but in regard to his supernatural and eternal life. For this purpose Eve was created, and she was to be the prototype of all her sex.

But, alas! you know only too well that the woman fell short of her exalted and sublime mission. She heedlessly lent her ear to the deceptive and flattering words of the serpent, she transgressed the divine behest, and, what was worse, persuaded her husband to do likewise. She who was destined to be the companion and helper of man, constituted herself his temptress; she was counter to the designs of God, and ruined both herself and the man whose companion she was.

From this sin of our first parents came all the evils which weigh upon humanity; the stubbornness, the aversion to what is good, the propensity to evil which we feel within ourselves, is the sad inheritance of our fallen nature; hence comes the difficulty we experience in attaining our end, the danger in which every woman finds herself of failing to accomplish her mission, and thus perpetuating Eve's fatal work. No wonder she should feel this, for if Eve failed to accomplish her high destiny—Eve, who was gifted with an intelligence so powerful, who was in a state of innocence and justice, who knew not the burden of bodily suffering—how much the more probable is it that her sinful daughters should fall short of it? They do, indeed, fall short of it; who can help weeping to behold beings so noble and so fair, created for such

lofty ends, who might be saints, the mothers and friends of saints, become the ministers of Satan for the perversion of men, the mothers and friends of reprobates. One need only look into the pages of history to see the names of numerous unhappy daughters of Eve a disgrace to their sex, who, having lost the fear of God, listened to the temptations of the devil, still whispering to them to eat of the forbidden fruit, and following the false maxims of the world, have gone headlong to perdition, and have drawn, alas! many poor souls after them.

The education of women in modern times is too often conducted according to the maxims of the world. It would have them emancipated, liberated—and from what? First, from God, from the laws of religion and of the Church, from dogmatic belief, from the practice of prayer; then from man, from the authority of fathers, brothers, husbands. Thus a net is woven, a snare, to render them instrumental in effecting the ruin, the destruction of manhood. As the serpent seduced Eve in order to make Adam fall, so the revolution, the evil spirit of the day, employs its malignant wiles to seduce the weaker sex with the idea of liberty, the assertion of her rights, emancipation; fair words, as pleasing to the ear as the forbidden fruit was to the eye, and no less deadly in the end. Unhappy those who are led astray by such notions! The dignity of woman lies in her weakness; the virtues which make her respected and beloved are the virtues of the weak—faith, modesty, prudence. If she forsakes God together with faith, she will lose virtue, and low indeed will be her fall. Of what use can she be then to her family, to society, to the world at large, to herself!

In order to repair the evil wrought by Eve, God sent unto the world another woman, no less perfect—far more perfect—than the first. Like her she was enriched with graces and privileges; but unlike her, she remained faithful to her vocation, she corresponded to the designs of

God, and accomplished her mission. It was Mary Immaculate, the new Eve, the greatest of women, exemplary and unrivalled as a daughter, a sister, a spouse, a mother. She passed through each of these phases of a woman's life in order to sanctify each state and leave an example to all other women. She possessed every virtue which becomes her sex, and possessed each one in the highest degree possible to a human being, in order that all women might take her for their model and learn of her. She was honored by God, that woman might be honored by man.

How grateful you ought to be to God, my children, for having given Mary to the world! How could you love and practise the virtues pertaining to your state, if there were not one in whom you could behold them in the highest perfection? How could women be expected to carry out the designs of God, to fulfil the mission He intrusts to them, when the mother whose daughters they are failed to do so? But now, thanks to our Blessed Lady, this difficulty is removed; they can imitate her, she will obtain for them grace and assistance; she is the new Eve, the true Mother of all living, the prototype of womankind.

How great is the influence Mary has exercised on behalf of her sex! How much she has ameliorated the condition of women, and how much good she has thereby enabled them to effect in the world! It is enough to say that before her coming, among all the nations of antiquity with few exceptions, women, instead of being esteemed and loved, were regarded by men as slaves, almost as brute animals. The birth of a girl was considered as a misfortune; the daughters of a family were so completely in the power of their father or brothers that they might be sold or exposed to become the prey of wild beasts; a wife was looked upon by her husband as a chattel which he had purchased, whose life and death

were at his disposal; and even as a mother she had neither dignity nor rights. Such was the case among nations who called themselves civilized; of the state of things among barbarians we will not even speak. How could those who had fallen so low exercise any influence for good? How could they be the helpers of man? How could they conceive any idea of their lofty mission? Give thanks to our Blessed Lady, my children; she it was who emancipated woman and raised her from her degradation —she it was who restored her to her former place in the sight of God and of man. And thus restored, she can and does labor, with Mary as her pattern, to accomplish the mission confided to her by God.

Let us glance at the various states of life, and see how, in each, woman may exert a beneficial influence upon the members of her family, upon society, upon the world at large.

As a daughter, it is true, her field of action is limited. Generally, it is restricted to her own family, or extends at most to her companions and acquaintances; yet how much good she may do! Fair, with a beauty that is not of earth, pure as an angel, she is beloved by her parents, envied by her neighbors, admired and imitated by her friends. Never does she address a disrespectful word to her parents, but is ever prompt in obeying them; she wins the hearts of her brothers and sisters by sharing in their wishes, their amusements, their sorrows, their joys, and their hopes. She is attentive to her duties, recollected at prayer, industrious at her work, merry at recreation, but with all modesty. If anything questionable is said before her, the troubled expression of her countenance checks the speaker; every profane or blasphemous word is hushed in her presence. If misfortune threatens the family, she offers herself to God as a victim to avert it. Who is this gentle and beneficial creature? A Christian daughter, a true Child of Mary.

As she grows older, her sphere of action is enlarged. Who knows how useful she may be to the members of her family? If unmarried herself, she may be called upon to fulfil the duties of a mother towards her orphaned nieces and nephews; and if her services are not thus required, she will find brothers and sisters for whom to work among the poor and afflicted of the great family of Jesus Christ. Or she may be called to a more distant field of usefulness; to forsake home and friends, all that makes life pleasant, to minister in remote lands to those who have none to love, none to succor them. She may be seen with her dark dress and white cap, watching by the sick in the wards of a hospital, or on the field of battle binding up the wounds of the soldier, heedless of the bullets that whistle around. Or we may follow her to foreign missions, where she will cross the deserts or penetrate the forest depths in search of infants who have been abandoned, and whom she will baptize and cherish. See, too, how patiently she instructs the children in the schools! Or her vocation may be to lead a contemplative life, idle and useless in the eyes of the world, but in reality one of arduous labor for the welfare of mankind. Within the walls of the cloister she passes her best years in prayer and mortification; and who can say she does not work? For as Victor Hugo says: "Prayer is indispensable for society, and it is necessary that there should be some to pray for those who never pray themselves." And who does all this? The true sister and helper of man—the Child of Mary.

What shall we say of the Christian wife? She has been called the providence of the family, and no name befits her better. She is a real providence for the husband God gives her, and the family into which she is received. By her affection for the man to whom, after God and for God, she has given her whole heart, she makes him happy and contented. All her thoughts, her attentions

are for him; her winning ways, her prudent tongue prevent any feeling of uneasiness, any thought of jealousy clouding his happiness. And oftentimes a soft word, a single glance, even a mere smile, will arrest a storm of anger, and restore serenity to his mind. Respectful to her superiors, courteous towards all, always cheerful in her manner, she will know how to preserve that peace and concord in her household which is requisite to the spiritual, moral, and even the material well-being of the family; she will be beloved by her husband, respected by all. Such is the Christian wife who is a Child of Mary.

Let us now contemplate her as a Christian mother. What is more noble, more sublime, more sacred, than the mission of a mother? Her love for her children is an emblem of the divine love; they are in her thoughts day and night; she lives but for them, she identifies herself with them, she takes part in their games when they are little, in their serious occupations when they are grown up. She sympathizes alike with the joys of the child and the sorrows of the man. She humors their fancies, she pardons their faults, and by a kind caress incites them to strive to do better. For woman's mission is not confined to giving birth to beings made after God's image; it is a far higher one, that of training their souls, forming them, moulding them, as it were. In fact, man is what his mother has made him; if she understands aright her high calling, the tremendous responsibility laid upon her, if she makes use of the grace given her by God, if, in a word, she is a truly Christian mother, she will give to God and to the world sons of whom she may be proud, she will form a family of saints. The household over which she presides will be a model one, wherein the laws of God and the Church are faithfully observed. Gather together households, and you constitute a community; communities, and you have a nation; thus you will have all Christendom formed at its mother's knee, the world the abode of just

men, and heaven filled with saints. Such is the task the Christian mother has to perform; through Mary and in Mary, she has become the most powerful helper of man and the redeemer of society; a co-operator, may we not add, in the work of the eternal Creator, of Jesus, the Saviour of mankind?

These things being so, none among you, my dear children, will fail to perceive how sublime is the mission woman has received from God, and which, now that she is restored to her primeval status by Mary, she is bound to fulfil. None of you can fail to appreciate the immeasurable good she may and does effect, if she is duly impressed with the importance of her mission. Woe to her, if she falls short of it! Woe still more to those who would tempt her to neglect it, who would turn her away from God. Every woman is naturally religious; but if she forsakes God she becomes a very demon, capable of causing the ruin of man, of society, of the world. God forbid that this should ever be so; yet it cannot be denied that there are many who seek to educate girls in anti-Christian principles. But God will not permit such efforts to succeed, for as He sent Mary into the world to raise the fallen daughters of Eve, to Mary their sanctification is also entrusted.

It is the object of the Confraternity of the Children of Mary to avert this great danger, the ruin of woman, and through her, of society. It aims at the sanctification of woman by the example of Mary Immaculate, and through her powerful patronage. To sanctify woman in order to render her fit to fulfil her vocation aright; to be the saviour of man, the family, society, the whole world; this is the end and object of our confraternity, and on this account all lovers of what is good should love and esteem it. You, above all, my children, who are members of it, ought thus to love it, and to work with it with a good will for the accomplishment of a mission alike noble, sacred, and divine.

SERMON III.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND THE CHOICE OF A STATE OF LIFE.

WHEN a young woman attains the age of eighteen or twenty years, she generally has to make her choice between three states of life: virginity in the religious state; virginity in the world; or, the state of matrimony. In other words, she may become a nun, live in the world unmarried, or she may marry. Of these three states I intend to speak in three separate conferences; but before treating of each state individually, it will be necessary to consider the election of a state in general, and lay before you some reflections which will serve as a compass to the mariner, and guide you in making your decision.

The world, which refuses to acknowledge the Divine Providence in the direction of human affairs, which considers the things of eternity as of no moment, and only prizes the things of time—honors, pleasures, and riches; the world, as you well know, considers this choice of a state of life as a matter to be left to one's natural inclination, wherein conscience is not concerned. But viewed in the light of faith, the election of a state is a matter that affects one's eternal interests—a matter wherein pre-eminently we must seek assistance from on high.

In this conference I shall speak first of the necessity of making choice of a state in life; I shall then proceed to give you some rules which will be most useful, nay indispensable, to enable you to decide wisely, and avoid the fault, so common among young people, of acting in an

affair of so great consequence without sufficient thought and deliberation.

If one looks at the various exigencies of human society on the one hand, and on the other, at the various needs, the various gifts, the various defects, not always culpable, of each individual, the fact becomes apparent—and it is abundantly corroborated by experience—that different states of life are requisite for different men and women, since all are not fitted for, or called to, the same state. It is God who prepares and adapts each individual for one or the other state, according to his several requirements; God, who in His providence, by ways that He sees right, directs each of His creatures towards the end for which he was created.

Besides the question of natural suitability for one state more than another, there are supernatural graces requisite for each, which are called graces of our state in life. It is universally acknowledged that when God calls any one to some particular state, He provides him with the assistance to enable him to fulfil the duties of that state; or, rather, as the Apostle Paul says, although God is not a debtor to any man, yet in the infinite wisdom of His providence He has prepared these graces, and in His unspeakable bounty He bestows them upon man, but on one condition: that each should be at his post, that each should walk in the way set before him,—in a word, that each should be in the state for which He Himself destined him.

This being so, it will be clearly perceived how necessary it is to discover to what state we are called, or what is our vocation, that we may follow it. St. Paul, in his epistles, impresses upon the faithful the grave duty of obeying the intimation of God's will in the choice of a state of life. He exhorts each one to walk in the way to which he is called: "As God hath called every one, so let him walk" (1 Cor. vii. 17); and again, he admonishes

every one to be faithful to his vocation: "Let every man abide in the same calling in which he was called." (Ib. vii. 20.)

The holy Fathers of the Church assert the election of one's state in life to be a matter of such importance that one's eternal happiness or misery depends upon whether it is made well or ill. And the reason of this is, they tell us, because from all eternity God has marked out the path each individual is to follow. If, in obedience to His voice, we choose the state whereto God calls us, to reward our fidelity He confers on us not only actual and ordinary graces, but also the special aid which we may require in that state, by means of which we may at any rate diligently fulfil the duties it imposes on us, live a Christian life, and work out our own salvation. If, on the contrary, we are so rash as to go counter to the will of God, choosing a state for which He has not destined us, then, angered by this act of rebellion against His dispositions, He will not only withhold the special graces indispensable to enable us to do good in that state, but will withdraw from us ordinary or common graces, and abandon us to ourselves, to reap the fruit of our wrong-doing.

Think, my children, to what danger a young girl exposes herself if in this all-important decision she asks counsel only of her own ambition, takes as her guide only her own fancies, her own inclinations, her own passions. She looks forward, perhaps, to her wedding-day as the happiest of her life; she thinks how she will outshine her companions, what rich presents she will receive, how fair a future lies before her. But if God has not called her to the married state how terribly she will have deceived herself; the roses in her path will change to sharp thorns; all her duties will be distasteful to her; subjection to her husband's authority, the cares children bring with them, the management of the household, constant

intercourse with uncongenial persons—all this will be so irksome that her life will be wretched, worse than death itself.

Let us look, on the other hand, at the lot of one who, though called to the married state, by some strange freak of fancy takes into her head to go into religion. For such a one the convent will be a prison, a continual martyrdom. The observance of the rules, the blind obedience to the will of her Superior that is required of her, the humiliations and mortifications to which she is subjected, the necessity of being hidden from the sight of the world, of renouncing its vanities and its pleasures, to give her whole affections to Jesus Christ—all these obligations, at variance with her tastes, her whole nature, are insuperable to one who is not called by God to the life of the cloister. The yoke of religion, sweet and light to those who bend their necks beneath it in accordance with the Divine Will, is an intolerable burden to her; constantly at warfare with herself, she makes not only her own misery, but the misery of all around her.

Unhappy those who, seeing before them what appears a pleasant road, think it must needs lead to an agreeable end, not considering that it may take them far from their desired goal, and end in an abrupt and fatal precipice.

Beware then, my dear children, beware lest you act heedlessly and hastily in so all-important, so critical a matter, on which your whole future depends! But how, you will perhaps ask me, are we to know to what state we are called by God? How can we be safe against illusion? I will give you a sure rule to follow in the election of a state in life; I will tell you the means you must employ.

The first means is prayer. The Church teaches us that, as a general rule, God does not give His light and His grace except to those who ask it of Him, who pray with fervor, with faith, with perseverance. How is it possible

that without prayer you could know how to decide so momentous a question? that you could obtain light in the midst of darkness? Who is it that alone can direct the course of your frail bark, tossing upon the tempestuous waves, and guide you to the port? who will enlighten your way? God, who is the Father of light. But to obtain His aid you must ask it in prayer. Strange indeed does it seem that while recourse is had to God in every necessity, however slight, His assistance should not be implored with far greater fervor when a decision of such weight has to be made, which will influence our whole future, and in which, more often than not, serious obstacles are wont to intervene, such as the wishes of parents, self-love, worldly interests, our own most cherished affections.

Be earnest therefore in prayer, since prayer has such power with God that He has pledged His word to grant all that we ask of Him for our soul's salvation. Follow the admonition the wise Tobias was never weary of repeating to his son: "Desire of God to direct thy ways." Ask of God the grace to know His will concerning you at your daily prayers, at Mass, after holy communion, when He is most ready to hear and grant your petitions. Ask of Him this grace frequently in the course of the day, in such words as these: Lord, teach me to know and follow Thy holy will in everything, especially in the election of a state. Let Thy light direct my steps. Vouchsafe, in this, the morning of my life, mercifully to infuse Thy grace into my heart, for all my hope is in Thee. Lord, what wouldst Thou have me do?

And, after God, you should have recourse with the utmost confidence and sincerity to Mary, the seat of wisdom, the Mother of Good Counsel, whom you have chosen for your Mother, and of whom St. Bernard was wont to say: "In all your troubles, in all your perplexities, think of Mary, call upon Mary." Then invoke your guardian angel, whom God has given you as a guide in

your earthly pilgrimage; invoke the saints under whose patronage you have placed your spiritual interests; employ every means within your power to obtain assistance, and you will not be allowed to rush headlong into the first path you see before you.

Another requisite for making a wise choice is the exercise of right judgment. And since, as a general rule, one is a bad adviser to one's self, true prudence dictates that we should not rely on our own judgment to form a right conclusion, in spite of our good-will and the careful deliberation wherewith we reflected upon the matter. Above all it is necessary to consult your spiritual director; open your heart to him fully, confide to him the doubts, the hesitations, the difficulties that perplex you; tell him what are your natural inclinations, your natural predilections, what is the bent of your mind, what you fear or hope for in the future, and let yourself be guided by him with all docility, for you may be assured that he will not be swayed by any consideration but that of your highest interests.

A good director of conscience is not only an able guide in the way of virtue, but he is a man of experience; he is the physician of the soul who detects the malady and applies a remedy; he is the counsellor who solves doubts and speaks with divine authority. Acquainted as he is with the secrets of your conscience, it may be said he is not only the most likely, but the only external means whereby you may learn what God would have you do, the only person who can speak openly and judge justly. Without such aid, however careful your reflection, however earnest your prayers, you are always liable to be deceived by self-love, by your imagination, by worldly advantages. But do as I have said, and not only will you incur no risk of being mistaken, but you will show yourself a humble, obedient child, who seeks not her own will but the will of God; and God who gives grace

to the humble, will give your director light to discern the way wherein to guide your feet.

And when, by the methods I have indicated, you have attained to a moral certainty of what is the will of God in regard to your state in life, do not hesitate about your choice. Do not be dismayed by the difficulties you may encounter, the burdens that state may lay on you; be assured, God will help you, and if your own strength is insufficient, He will double it, multiply it with His grace. If you do the will of God, what have you to fear? Does not Holy Scripture say that victory is the portion of the soul that obeys: *vir obediens loquetur victoriam.*

Remember, then, dear children, the supreme importance attaching to the choice of a state of life; remember to keep yourselves from making a wrong choice, that you will thereby deprive yourself of all the blessings God showers upon those who make a good one. Be guided, therefore, by the Divine Will, not the promptings of human nature. Banish every thought of ambition, vainglory, interest, all lower considerations, lest you be misled by them. Conscious as you are that life has been given you for the sole end of working out your eternal salvation, that this alone is of real importance, seek by prayer, by reflection, by consulting others, to ascertain which of the different ways that lead to heaven will be the safest for you, and enter upon it willingly and gladly. And in it you will find all the assistance you need for the attainment of your ultimate end.

SERMON IV.

THE CHILD OF MARY CALLED TO THE RELIGIOUS LIFE.

Of the three states of life to which a young girl may be called, the religious state is undoubtedly the most perfect. This our divine Lord Himself told us when He said to Martha, who complained that her sister Mary, instead of helping her in the work of the house, sat at His feet to hear His word, "Mary has chosen the better part."

Thus a young girl, who, turning her back on the fair prospect the world offers, on its pleasures and its vanities, decides upon embracing the religious life in order to give her affections more fully to God, to dedicate herself body and soul to His service, chooses as Mary, the owner of the rich estates of Magdala did, the better part, the part which, by safeguarding her from the perils and seductions of the world, will enable her more easily to attain her final end, the eternal salvation of her soul. "The passage from the cell to Paradise," says St. Bernard, "is easy; it would be difficult to imagine a soul having lived in a monastery until death, and passing thence to hell." And St. Laurence Justinian says: "The monastic cell is the ante-chamber of heaven; for it is a clear sign of predestination to have been called to the religious life on earth."

It is my purpose in this conference to set before you the advantages of the religious state in comparison with the other two states, without, however, in any way casting contempt on these states; for, although they are less

perfect, because in them the heart is divided and the mind distracted, yet they are both, one and the other, good and holy, and in both Christian perfection may be attained. Thus, if among my hearers there should be one whom God has favored with the signal grace of a vocation to the religious life, let her take courage and follow the gentle call, not allowing herself to be disheartened by the obstacles and difficulties that may present themselves, whencesoever they arise.

In order that you may more readily perceive the greater spiritual advantages that the religious state presents I cannot do better than place before you, as in two pictures, the different aspects of life in the world and in religion.

If you look at the world around you, you will see at once that its maxims are not those of the Gospel. The world calls the most dangerous amusements necessary recreations; the most shameful passions, the mere mention of which should call a blush to our cheek, are glossed over as the frailty of nature; the practice of penance, so indispensable to hold the flesh in check, is termed a relic of barbarous times, now quite obsolete; and prayer, an occupation for pious little girls. Afflictions which caused the saints to rejoice are looked upon by the world as terrible misfortunes; temporal prosperity, which the Gospel teaches us to despise, is its highest aim; hatred is a creditable and noble feeling; revenge is justifiable and right. Virtuous actions are not esteemed, they are stigmatized as contemptible weakness, pusillanimity of spirit. Such are the maxims and principles of the world, such are also its ways, and in this atmosphere all who embrace either of the two secular states must live. Who can describe the dangers encountered almost at every step through evil examples, thanks to which vice has become a familiar thing, partly because of the numbers who fall into it, partly because of the authority of those who extol and even reward it. Who can de-

scribe the dangers encountered in conversation with worldlings, when topics are discussed at which a heathen might blush, religion is ridiculed, and nothing in heaven or earth is held sacred. Who can describe the dangers encountered in friendship, in business, in the books and journals of the day, which are so often destructive of good morals. And how much might be said of the dangers encountered in the matrimonial state, keenly desired as it is by the majority of young girls—dangers to the wife from enforced intercourse with her husband's relatives and friends, from the amusements in which he compels her to take part.

And this is not all; when to the dangers of the world we add the burdens, the sorrows, the cares of the world, it will scarcely appear a very delightful place of abode. Let us glance at the lot of the married woman—a lot supposed by many to be the most fair, the most attractive, the most blissful upon earth. How soon the roses fade and naught but thorns remain,—thorns, too, both sharp and piercing. St. Paul, speaking of virgins who marry, says that they shall have tribulation of the flesh, though he does not say what the tribulation is, wishing to spare those who, not having the gift of continency, desire to enter the wedded state.

Who can recount the cares, the anxieties that weigh upon the married woman, whether on account of her husband, of her children, or of interfering relatives. Supposing she is fondly attached to her husband, the man for whose sake she left home and friends, how grieved, how heartbroken, she will be if he requite her affections with coldness, with dislike and aversion; if he prove unfaithful and show preference for others, squandering on them the money that should be spent on his children. Or if she is pious and God-fearing, how acute the pain it would cause her to see the partner of her life indifferent to religion, neglectful of his duties, living, perhaps, in

open unbelief and defiance of God's laws. Again, think of the anxiety children cause their mother—the difficulty of bringing them up, the vexation occasioned by their childish faults, the grief of seeing them perhaps take to evil ways when they are no longer children; the trials of sickness, of death in the family, the strife and dissension excited by outsiders. Alas! how many hapless wives eat their bread with weeping, and at night water their couch with their tears, cursing the day of their nuptials, when they thought themselves entering Paradise; whereas, they now find themselves in a very different place.

Were I to reveal to you the secret interior of families, many a sad picture would present itself to you: divisions, jealousies, suspicions; love grown cold, nay even changed to hate. But let this suffice. You see what a secular life is; a life passed in an atmosphere of false maxims, a life surrounded with danger, burdened with care; a life more deserving of compassion than of envy.

And now let us look at the religious state, and see what is the atmosphere that pervades the monastery.

When the Hebrews were about to enter the land promised to their fathers, the Lord said to them, speaking by the mouth of Moses: "The land of which you will possess yourselves is not like the land of Egypt, whence ye came out. Shut in by mountains and forests that keep off the rough winds, watered by fair and limpid rivers, it is a land of fertile plains and gentle hills, extending beneath a tranquil sky; it abounds in all good things, for the Lord dwells there and showers upon it His choicest benedictions." The religious state, my children, resembles this Promised Land. The monastery walls, the enclosure, the vows of religion, are the mountains and forests that close it round and keep off the blast of worldly aims and affections; the fertile plains are the Rule, easy to observe and rich in merit; the gentle hills

are the different steps to perfection; the cloudless sky is the peace that reigns within; the sweet and limpid streams are the graces bestowed by God.

It is indeed unlike the world, which may be compared to the land of Egypt, swept by the stormy winds of the desert, scorched by the burning breath of the plains, irrigated by the muddy waters of the Nile. What can come near you to trouble you in the cloister? The evil concupiscences of the flesh? No; removed from all wherewith the world is wont to tempt the senses and seduce the heart, the religious is not exposed to anything that might entice the eye, ensnare the ear, or suggest evil, anything that might prevent her from giving her whole heart to God. The religious habit does not, it is true, extinguish every sensual desire; yet everything around inspires chaste and holy thoughts, inspires love for the angelic virtue of purity, and renders it easy to subdue the flesh to the spirit. Or does the thought of the many and varied amusements of the world disturb the peace of the religious? No; for whereas a secular life is usually desultory and uncertain, without rule or fixed occupation, in the convent all is wisely regulated—each day has its stated work, each hour its regular employment; and with the Rule for her guide, always the same, always safe, for it is the voice of God Himself, the nun pursues with alacrity the path of virtue and perfection. Or does attachment to earthly possessions trouble her? No; for from the moment when she has nothing to call her own, when she can have nothing for her own, the very thought of worldly goods and the cares they bring with them are banished from her mind; she is no longer in danger of fraudulent dealings, deceit, injustice, of falling into the sins of pride and ostentation that too often accompany the possession of riches.

In addition to all this, there is the assistance of the religious exercises, of which there are so many in the

life of a convent, and which are calculated to mortify the passions gradually, root out bad habits, and lay the religious under the obligation of guarding against the least transgression, and arresting the first step in the direction of more serious faults. If now and again, through the frailty of human nature and our innate tendency to sin, she should fall into some fault, she will quickly rise again, helped by the good example of her sisters and the motherly counsels of her superiors, not to speak of the graces peculiar to the religious state, communicated in abundance, efficacious to deliver from sin. Our Lord Himself, in His revelation to St. Catharine, declared that the religious state was the safest, if only for this reason, that those who fall have greater help, greater strength afforded them to rise up again. Moreover, there is the assistance of good example, for it cannot be denied that living in the society of pious virgins, who inspire one with the love of duty and even render it attractive, who feel for the weakness of others and encourage them when disheartened, acts as a powerful stimulus in well-doing and as a force to bear one onward with the rest in the performance of duty. There are besides the interior consolations that Our Lord, according to His promise, bestows in plentiful measure on His spouses—consolations that not only sweeten all that is bitter to nature in the religious life, but make it pleasant and dear to all who embrace it. For the religious who has renounced all the joys of the world has a keener appreciation of spiritual joys; and for her the words of Our Lord are fulfilled which declare that those who give up the world for the service of God shall receive a hundredfold in this present life, and eternal happiness in the world to come: "*Centuplum accipiet et vitam æternam possidebit.*"

To all these privileges belonging to the religious state, great as they are, another, the chiefest of all, is to be added, that of a holy death.

It is quite true that in the world many persons make a holy and happy end. But the religious has far less than the secular to distract the heart and mind at the moment of death; the soul is possessed by one thought alone: to die as she has lived, in the love of God, in the service of God. Thus the learned and pious Suarez, of the Society of Jesus, was heard to exclaim upon his death-bed: "How sweet a thing it is, O my God, to die. And if it is such happiness to die with my God near me, what will it be to live eternally with Him? Come quickly, death, who art so delightful, so blissful. I could never have believed that it was so joyful a thing to die." St. Aloysius, with his latest breath exclaimed: "Let us depart, oh, how joyful!" And St. Peter of Alcantara's last words were those wherewith the Te Deum commences: "*Te Deum laudamus.*" The hymn of praise begun on earth was ended in heaven.

I have now set before you some of the advantages of the religious state. It is rich in merits and in graces, as Our Lord indicated to the young man in the Gospel when He said to him: "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come follow Me." Which was equivalent to saying: Heaven is the reward of those who observe the law of God in the world; but the recompense promised to those who practise the evangelical counsels is a special treasure laid up in heaven. St. Laurence Justinian remarks in connection with this: "God, in His infinite wisdom, has concealed from seculars the privileges appertaining to the religious state; for were they aware of them, they would one and all leave the world and besiege the doors of the monastery." We read that St. Magdalen of Pazzi leaned against the walls of her convent, and kissed them, saying as she did so, "O walls, from how much that is evil you have preserved me! If outsiders knew the felicity enjoyed by the servants of God, they would climb the walls of the monastery to take their place among us.

Wherefore, my children, that young girl may be accounted happy, who, in the spring-tide of life, in the bloom of health and strength, when all around looks fair, refuses the earthly spouse proposed to her and desirous only of the beauty of the divine Spouse goes to hide herself from the eyes of man in the retirement of the cloister. There, in that abode of tranquillity and peace, where the blossoms of virtue are safe from the nipping frost, out of the reach of the follies, the affections, the cares of the world, her soul will open to the influences of grace, she will be united to God in the indissoluble bond of chaste and pure espousals.

The world will pity this maiden, and deem her mad, so blind are its judgments! But those who are versed in the things of God will exclaim with the Queen of Saba, when she returned from Jerusalem astonished at the sight of the regal magnificence of Solomon's palace, and still more at the surpassing wisdom of the king: "Blessed are thy men and blessed are thy servants, who stand before thee always, and hear thy wisdom!" (3 Kings x. 8.) Those, I say, who understand the things of God, will congratulate this fortunate maiden, who lives in the shadow of the altar of God, continually occupied in praising Him and serving Him as His sister, His spouse. God grant, my dear children, that many of you may be guided to this haven of safety.

SERMON V.

THE CHILD OF MARY UNMARRIED IN THE WORLD.

THERE is a state which is neither the religious nor the married state, but, as it were, something between the two: that of a woman who chooses to lead a secular life without marrying, either in her own home or elsewhere, according as Providence may dispose.

Although inferior to the religious state, since it does not involve a complete renunciation of the world and of one's own will, this state of life is undoubtedly superior to that of matrimony, since it leaves a woman free to devote herself to spiritual things; and her heart not being fettered by the bond of wedlock, may, despising worldly vanities, rise with greater impetus, greater purity of intention to the Creator of all things. It is the state of one who, having heard the voice of the divine Master vouchsafing to ask of her her undivided affections, would gladly in obedience to that call withdraw from the world and give herself wholly to Him in holy seclusion. Obliged, however, either through duties in the world, infirm health, the opposition of her parents, or other circumstances known only to God, to content herself with the simple desire, she decides to live in the world as if not of it, and in as far as possible follow the evangelical counsels and apply herself to the attainment of Christian perfection.

St. Paul, writing to the faithful in Thessalonica says: "This is the will of God, your sanctification." In these words he gives us to understand that it is the duty of all Christians whether fathers and mothers of families, children or servants, artisans or peasants, even those whose life

is one of continuous labors and anxiety, to accomplish their own sanctification. How much more is it binding upon you to sanctify yourselves, who, while living in the world, have resolved to renounce the world and give yourselves to the service of God.

So live for God alone; to use the things of the world only as far as is necessary and without allowing your hearts cling to them; not merely to avoid every one of those occasions, too common in the world, when the soul is exposed to be contaminated, but also to strive to the utmost to correct every fault, purge away every stain however slight, in order to become more pleasing in God's sight,—this is the programme set before you. It is not enough that you should keep the commandments, you ought to aspire after greater perfection. "If thou wouldst be perfect," Our Lord said to the young man, "go, sell what thou hast," detach thy heart from creatures "and come, follow Me." If the ordinary measure of sanctity, which permits a share of one's affections to be given to creatures, is all that is required of women whose vocation it is to mix in the busy world, the sanctity required of you is of a nobler character, a higher order, a sanctity which excludes all love of creatures except that which charity demands, a sanctity wherein is concentrated the beauty of all virtues that adorn the Christian, sanctity of heart, and soul, and body.

Nor is it enough that you should strive earnestly after holiness, you must make it your constant aim to increase in holiness. "Be you perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect," Our Lord says; and by these words He does not lay us under the obligation of attaining the perfection of a God who is infinite in all His attributes, for this is a thing impossible to any created being; He only enjoins upon us the duty of approaching as nearly as possible to the divine perfection. Of Christ Himself it is said that He advanced in wisdom, and age, and grace

with God and man. And long before that, it was said of the child Samuel that he advanced and grew on, and pleased both the Lord and men.

This then, is what each one of you ought to do; as you advance in age, you should become more zealous in doing good, more prudent, more humble, more modest, that in all your actions you may please God, rejoice your parents, set a good example to your friends. Beware lest you stop short in the way of virtue, for thus you will run the risk of losing more than you have gained; the heart of man is like a field in which the ill weeds spring up afresh as fast as they are rooted up, and without constant vigilance they will strike root and grow apace. You must ever bear this truth in mind, that, on the path of perfection, to stand still is to go back. We are told in the Gospel that no man putting his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God. Understand, therefore, that in order to reach the height of perfection towards which you ought continually to tend, you must never relax your efforts, let your attention wander, nor cease to exercise the utmost watchfulness over your actions, your thoughts, the desires of your heart. For, as St. Gregory says, like an oarsman who, finding himself in the midst of a swiftly flowing river, desires to rest a while, weary of rowing against the current, is in danger of drifting downward and being engulfed by the raging stream, so are those who pursue the way of perfection: if they cease to struggle and to press onward, they will speedily be borne backward towards the whirlpools of sin.

If, then, this work is so incessant and so all-important that no obstacles must be allowed to arrest it, we must be told how to remove the difficulties which hinder us in the attainment of holiness.

The first of these is dissipation. A young girl who desires to sanctify herself in the world must shun its

gayeties, and take part but seldom in its social gatherings, for these, without being wrong in themselves, are yet of the world, worldly. For the world, as even you will know, does not understand the things of the spirit, of the devout life; and if it pays any heed to religion, it is only to discredit its dogmas, to deride its practices. Beware, then, how you take part in the conversation of worldlings; and if you are obliged to be present, be present in body but absent in spirit; do what necessity or good manners demands of you, but do it with inward reluctance, longing for the time when you may withdraw from the company; hedge round your heart and mind with good and holy thoughts, and set a watch over your words and actions. For, by entering into conversation with zest, eager to talk, eager to hear everything, we shall certainly endanger our progress in perfection.

Therefore, leave the votaries of the world to display themselves in public, to appear on the crowded promenades, at the gay entertainments, for such things, like a cloud of smoke, do but hide heaven to our sight. Hold yourself aloof from them; hold aloof from them in heart, in mind, and, so far as is possible, in bodily presence; for only by so doing can you hope to live with God alone, to live for God alone.

The second obstacle is attachment to something in the world. "The bird that is free," says St. Alphonsus, "soars high; but if he be bound even by a thread, he grovels on the ground, unable to rise. And, in fact, attachment of any kind whatsoever is so prejudicial to the attainments of sanctity, that to fall daily into greater imperfections of a different nature is not so harmful to the soul. It was not until St. Teresa, that impassioned lover of Jesus Christ, had detached herself completely from the love of creatures that it was given her to hear Our Lord say: "Thou art wholly Mine, Teresa, and I am wholly thine." Alas, for those whose hearts are not detached! How-

ever trifling the object to which they cling, it will prove a bond that will prevent the elevation of the heart to God that will draw them from the pursuit of virtue.

If, then, any of you are thus fettered, break the bond at once, cut the ties that hold you captive. Do not dally with it; break it off, cut it through, sever it with a stroke. Be not deluded by self-love, beguiled by fair appearances, blinded by the devil; if you detect any engrossing affection, not unlawful indeed, but which you know is dangerous, stifle it, tear it out of your heart. Imitate St. Francis of Sales, that great master of the spiritual life, who said: "Were I conscious that there was a single fibre of my heart that was not for God. I would forthwith tear it out."

The last obstacle is a certain depression and discouragement, which makes perfection appear to one as a thing to be attained only by those fortunate souls who can seek shelter in a monastery, and are not compelled to live in the world, where everything seems to combine against the attainment of holiness.

True enough, sanctity costs much less to the inmate of a monastery than to one who lives in the world, meeting with difficulties on every side, even in her own family. But for that very reason, the woman who lives unmarried in the world has sometimes opportunities of acquiring greater merit, virtue of a higher order than her sister in the convent, where an atmosphere of piety prevails. But the idea that it is impossible for one who leads a secular life to sanctify herself, with the assistance of grace, is quite mistaken, as is proved by the example of many who, in the state of which we are speaking, became eminent for their sanctity.

And if the work of your sanctification should be impeded by the perils surrounding you in the world, if, perhaps, despite your generous resolve to give yourself entirely to God, you should be overtaken by some frailty or

fall into some fault, God forbid that you should yield to discouragement and despair of reaching your goal. Turn to God, and imitate the busy merchant who, having unfortunately met with some loss, works all the harder to make up the deficit. Fear not, God will help you. As He has done in the past, so now He still works wonders in the souls that correspond faithfully to grace; if you listen to the inspirations of grace, and co-operate with it, you will soon discover by your own happy experience that with God's help not only may one escape the dangers of the world, but go on unto perfection.

It is true that we must struggle against our natural inclinations and the allurements of the world; it is true that we have to contest the ground inch by inch with our passions, to mortify our will and our senses; that, in a word, the work of our sanctification demands many an effort, many a sacrifice. So true is this that Our Lord Himself declared that the kingdom of heaven suffered violence, and the violent bear it away. And lest we should think the strife will soon be over, we are told that man's life on earth is a continual warfare. "*Militia est homines vita.*" Yet the difficulties are not insuperable and often prove less formidable than they appear; what seems impossible to human weakness is easy to God, and He has promised to give to those who overcome, a hidden manna, that is, interior consolations, that will make all sacrifices light, and turn into sweetness all that is bitter. "*Vincenti datio manna absconditum.*" And the Apostle tells us that the tribulations, the spiritual trials of the devout life, heavy as they appear, are not to be compared to the eternal weight of glory which is reserved as the reward of virtue and sanctity.

Take heart then, my children, and give yourselves with renewed fervor and alacrity to the work of your sanctification, a work to which the Friend, the Spouse of your soul calls you. Remember that God counts all your struggles,

that He accepts your sacrifices; that the recompense you will one day receive is none other than Himself. And resolve with the help of the Blessed Virgin, who is your Mother, that cost what it may, you will give yourself to God without reserve; that you will walk with fidelity and fervor in the way of godliness; that, in a word, you will strive to become saints, model Christians, even while living in a world where all is antagonistic to holiness and perfection.

SERMON VI.

THE CHILD OF MARY CALLED TO THE MARRIED STATE.

AFTER having spoken to you in the two preceding conferences of the Child of Mary called to the religious life and the Child of Mary living unmarried in the world, it remains for me to speak to you to-day of the Child of Mary called to the married state, the state which I suppose the majority of you look forward to entering.

Although virginity consecrated to God is as superior to wedlock as heaven is to earth, yet it cannot be denied that the state of matrimony is a holy state. It is holy, because it was instituted by God, and declared by Him to be good; it is holy, because it was ordained for the purpose of filling heaven with saints; it is holy, because it was raised by Christ Himself to the dignity of a sacrament; it is holy, because of the mystery of which it is a type, for marriage is an emblem of the union of Our Lord with His spotless bride, the Church. St. Paul calls it a great sacrament. But while inferior to and less perfect than the state of virginity, it is in some respects far more difficult: whether on account of the nuptial bond being indissoluble, so that once tied death alone can sever it; or whether because it imposes on those who embrace it charges and duties of so important a nature that upon their right fulfilment the welfare or ruin of families, the salvation or perdition of many souls, may justly be said to depend.

For the encouragement of those who may be called to this state, it must be said that God does not require the same virtues from the married that He does from the un-

married; and if He exacts more from those to whom He has given more, He will in justice make allowances for those who have duties of a more difficult nature to perform.

To-day I intend to speak of the preparation necessary to take this momentous step aright. But first of all let me ask you this question: My children, do you know what it is to be married? Not if you judge of it by the rash, the eager manner in which girls generally enter this state. Look at them! they see in it nothing but joy and festivity: to be married is the height of felicity, almost too good for earth. It is no use to speak to them of the weighty responsibilities they are about to take upon themselves, the troubles that await them, the serious nature of a bond which is indissoluble; they see all in a rosy light, they anticipate a position of liberty and authority for themselves; pleasures that will be lifelong, and they too often rush into marriage with deplorable heedlessness.

Yet the marriage state can certainly not be compared to a fair garden where there is nothing but flowers; but, rather, to a copse bristling with thorns and briers. Those who embrace this state are obliged to place on their wrists fetters which once fastened can never be undone; to pass their life in such close union with a man that all their hopes and fears, their joys and sorrows, their weal and woe, must be shared with him; to bring up a family, watching over its growth and development, not merely as regards the material life of the body, but, what is no easy matter, tending the spiritual, supernatural life, a work demanding infinite patience, vigilant care, perfect self-renunciation—virtues of no common order. In a word, it is a state so arduous and difficult, that, though it has its consolations and advantages, these are for the most part more than outweighed by its labors and crosses. I do not say this to deter you from marrying, but because I desire that you should not do so without serious reflec-

tion; lest, should you take this step without knowing what it really is that you are doing, it should ere long mark the close of your happy days, and inaugurate a long series of miserable years.

Assuming, then, that you are called by God to the married state, let us ask what are the principal preparations to be made in order that your nuptials may be blessed and prove a source of peace and happiness to yourself.

As we are told in Holy Scripture that "a prudent wife is from the Lord," that is to say, a good and faithful wife is a gift from God to a man, who shows himself deserving of her by his virtuous life; so it may be said that Providence bestows a good husband on the woman whose conduct proves her to be worthy of him. Hence it is evident that the practice of Christian virtues is an essential preliminary to marriage. "Do you desire," says St. Augustine, addressing Christian maidens, "to find a spouse who is wise, virtuous, and gentle? See that you deserve such a one by the decorum of your conduct; be discreet, chaste, regular in the performance of your duties; do not put yourselves forward in order to attract men; the violet, though hidden, is discovered by the fragrance it diffuses around; Providence will arrange all for the best for you."

If any of you think to prepare for marriage by vain and frivolous behavior, by adorning her person, frequenting balls and entertainments as often as possible, exhibiting herself in public as much as possible, she will not merit the blessing of God. She may indeed receive the adulations of amorous youths, whose lips overflow with honeyed words, perhaps with flattering promises, but there is little chance that any man of worth will wish to make her his wife. He may amuse himself with her for a time, but when he thinks seriously of marrying he will have the sense to look for something more than elegant dress and pretty speeches, nor will he attach too much

importance to beauty; he will ask himself whether the girl will make a good mistress for his household, a loving companion for himself.

Therefore, if you desire God to give you grace to contract a suitable and happy marriage, remember that the best means to attain your end is to lead a modest, pure, and pious life, for thus only can you hope to win the affection and esteem of a man of good principles who will make you happy. Avoid all dangerous occasions, especially any approach to too great familiarity, the most formidable snare which the devil spreads for the young. Do not be afraid that by living a retired life you will lose all chance of marrying young; the reverse of this is often the case. And when you are engaged, observe the same caution and modest reserve in your intercourse with your affianced husband; so that when you stand with him at the altar you may be able to say with the virtuous Sara: "Thou knowest, O Lord, that I . . . have kept my soul clean from all lust. Never have I joined myself with them that play, neither have I made myself partakers with them that walk in lightness." (Tob. iii. 16, 17.)

Another essential of a good marriage is not to engage one's self without the consent and approval of one's parents, still less in opposition to their will.

We remark in Holy Scripture that whenever the nuptials of young people are mentioned, the arrangements seem to rest with the parents, not with the young people themselves. Thus we read in Ecclesiasticus (vii. 27): "Marry thy daughter well, and thou shall do a great work and give her to a wise man." And St. Paul takes it for granted that a father has the disposal of his daughter's hand: "He that giveth his virgin in marriage doth well." Whence it follows that although children are at liberty to choose the state of life to which they feel themselves called, their parents having no right to use any compulsion in this matter, yet if they would have the blessing

of God on their choice, especially where marriage is concerned, they would do well to consult their parents, whose duty and right it is to counsel them in an affair of so great importance, and not act contrary to their wishes, unless circumstances should render it a duty to do so.

Under the Old Law, the marriage of their sons and daughters rested entirely with their parents; it was for them to select husbands and wives for them. Holy Scripture says of Esau, who married without the consent of his saintly parents, Isaac and Rebecca, that his union proved an unhappy one. Whereas of Sara, a maiden so innocent in God's sight that only to a man who feared God could she be given in wedlock, we are told that when asked in marriage by the good Tobias she would give no answer until she had asked the consent of Raguel, her father. And as soon as she had ascertained that he approved of the match, she agreed to it readily; the result being that her union was one so holy and blessed that it is held up to us as a model marriage. Thus we perceive that God blesses the nuptials of those who pay due deference to their parents' wishes; while if His anger does not actually rest upon those who in so grave and decisive a matter follow their own caprices, at any rate He withholds from them the graces without which no union can be happy. Nor can we wonder at this: for, considering how great are the benefits a daughter receives from her parents, how great the claim they have on her affection and gratitude, it is only just that God should punish the want of respect, the heartlessness of a daughter who takes so solemn a step without their knowledge, or even in defiance of their wishes.

And if fathers and mothers are unreasonable, as it cannot be denied that some are, or proud and unfeeling to such an extent that they seek to force their daughters into alliances which, on account of disparity of age, incompatibility of temperament, or difference of religion,

promise nothing but misery; or if from avarice, or some base motive, they refuse to let them marry a good and upright man, suitable in every respect—under circumstances so painful, a young girl can do nothing but wait patiently, praying God to change her parents' hearts, and confiding her difficulties to and asking the advice of some near relative or tried friend of the family. She may be sure that if it be the will of God some method of escape will be found.

The last means of preparation is prayer and the reception of the sacraments.

The Holy Spirit tells us in the Scriptures that a wise and kind spouse is a gift of God. But it is His will that His gifts should be asked of Him in prayer, which is the key that opens the celestial treasury. To whom should we confide our wants if not to God, who is always ready to hear us, and who in all circumstances of our life acts towards us as a loving Father, who disposes all for the good of those who trust entirely in Him.

And your prayer will be all the more efficacious if you approach the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist with special and careful preparation. The Church who, as a fond mother, is ever solicitous for the welfare of her children, knowing the burdens those take upon themselves who enter into matrimony, and the purity of heart wherewith they ought to receive so solemn a sacrament, exhorts the faithful before marriage to cleanse their conscience by a good confession, and fortify themselves with the Bread of Heaven, in order that Christ, who was present at and blessed the wedding at Cana, may be present at and bless their nuptials, that their union may prove a source of peace on earth, a means of help on the way to heaven.

Nor is it only for the sake of cleansing your conscience that you should enter the confessional, but also to ask of your director the counsel of which you stand in need.

And I advise you not to defer doing so, as is the case with too many, until the eve of your wedding, for you will do well to make a general confession of your past life; this is usually recommended to persons who are about to change their state.

If, therefore, it is your wish, my children, one day to be united in marriage with a young man who fears God, and see a well-ordered family grow up around you, prepare yourself for this step by the piety and virtue of your life. Do not look out for admirers; that is not the way to make a good marriage. Trust to your parents' good sense, remember they have your best interests at heart: be fervent in prayer, and keep your conscience without stain.

If such are your dispositions, happy are you! For on that day, a solemn day for you, when, amid the good wishes and congratulations of friends and guests, accompanied to the church by your relatives, greeted at the portals of the sacred edifice by sweet harmonies, you stand at the side of your affianced husband, at the foot of the altar, where you have so often knelt in prayer, and there plight your troth, which the priest will sanctify and bless in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, the benediction thus given will be ratified in heaven and fulfilled on earth, abundant grace will be given to you.

And when in the Nuptial Mass, the priest calls upon all the Church to join with him in entreating that you may be amiable like Rachel, wise like Rebecca, long-lived and faithful like Sara, and that you may see your children's children unto the third and fourth generation,—God will pour out His blessing upon you in no scant measure. Thus fortified, if in your wedded life you meet with trials, sorrows, afflictions—and these, the Apostle tells us, are the lot of all married persons—you will be enabled to bear them patiently, they will turn to your good, and be for you a means of gaining Paradise, since it was with such excellent dispositions that you embraced this state.

SERMON VII.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND TRUE DEVOTION.

THE principal object of this confraternity, I need scarcely remind you, is to preserve you from the dangers that beset your path in life, and to promote your growth in piety and godliness. It is enough to glance at the rules of this association, at the daily, weekly, monthly, and annual exercises which the Children of Mary are recommended to make use of, in order to convince one's self that they are all directed to this one end, to increase the spirit of devotion in the soul of the Christian.

Nevertheless, experience proves that although among the members of this pious association there are many who really love God, and seek in all things to please Him, yet there are also not a few who, without being altogether blameworthy, do not conduct themselves as those should who profess to live a devout life. What is the reason of this? It is generally because they have formed a false idea of what devotion actually is.

Some persons, indeed, think that devotion consists in observing the outward practices of religion—prayers, mortification, almsgiving—and paying attention exclusively to the external form, while they are heedless of what constitutes the kernel of religion; they become like plants that abound in verdant foliage, but are utterly destitute of any fruit. Others consider devotional practices as a task too arduous for them, as the privilege of a few chosen souls, or at any rate as incompatible with the numerous and varied duties of their calling; thus, through entertaining this mistaken conception of devotion, although they

admire and even envy it in others, yet they do not cultivate it in themselves, and end by serving God after a half-hearted and slothful fashion.

With the view of dispelling these false notions, so fatal to the devout life, I intend to-day to speak about devotion, showing you in what it really consists; that seeing it in its true light, you may perceive that not only is there nothing in it beyond your reach, but also that with the help of God any one who chooses to practise it will find it no burden at all.

Devotion, therefore, is nothing else than the performance of all that appertains to the service of God, with a ready heart and a willing mind, promptly and diligently. Hence the truly devout person is one who, loving God above all and giving Him the foremost place in her thoughts, keeps His law and obeys His precepts, doing this with alacrity and good-will, even when they are repugnant to nature or demand a sacrifice, with the conviction that she is thereby doing the will of God.

This definition will suffice to convince you how deluded are those who think to lead a devout life by continually running to church, assisting at grand services, reciting long prayers, fasting, and giving alms and allowing a secondary place to the duties God requires them to fulfil, the duties of their state in life, or perhaps neglecting them altogether. All these practices are good works, inspired by the spirit of devotion, but they do not constitute devotion, which, as I have said, consists in doing all that God under existing circumstances makes known to be His will. Therefore, give yourself to prayer when you know it to be God's will that you should pray; leave your prayers and betake yourself to your work when it is His will that you should work and not pray. Go to church, approach the sacraments, if you think He wills that you should do so, but stay at home and employ yourself in household matters, or go wherever there is a brother, a

sister, a neighbor who is sick, and to whom you can render assistance, provided you know it is the will of God that you should thus spend your time. In a word, devotion consists in desiring, in seeking God; God in all things, at all seasons, sacrificing for this end your own wishes, your own inclinations, even the ease and comfort of your life.

Hence we see that no one is truly devout who, however careful to keep the law of God in those points which agree with her natural heart, her natural propensities, does not hesitate to violate them if they clash with her own inclinations, her own liking. She is not truly devout who, while she is all anxiety and kindness in helping the poor and sick, does not scruple to take away another's good name, to give free rein to her tongue, to indulge feelings of every hatred and desire of revenge. She is not truly devout who, while she is all fervor in adopting some religious exercise, fulfils the duties of her state grudgingly; who is reluctant to help her mother in the house, dictatorial to her younger brothers and sisters, and uncivil to her friends. Nor is she truly devout who, one day all aglow with pious fervor, is on the morrow cold and indifferent, not caring to raise her heart to God. This is not the devotion that pleases God who, as the Creator and sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, has the right to demand that His creatures render Him glory, honor, and service in everything, in every state, in every manner that He may will. And although true devotion ought to manifest itself in works, without which it would be sterile and imperfect, yet if these works are done from motives of vainglory, from a wish to be counted better than others, if they are not sanctified by the pure intention of pleasing God, the devotion that prompts them is a thing of naught, a body without a soul, an artificial flower destitute of life or fragrance.

And now let us see, in the example of a Child of Mary,

what true devotion really is. On awakening in the morning, her first thought is one of joy and gratitude to God; she thanks Him for the repose of the night that is past, she offers to Him all the actions of the coming day, all the thoughts of her mind, all the affections of her heart. She dresses modestly and quietly, and kneels down to say her prayers, which ascend like sweet incense to God, imploring His gracious protection during the day, and praying Him to send one of His angels to watch over her home and enrich it with divine blessings. And if the other members of her family should unfortunately be hostile to religion, she will not make this an excuse for omitting her prayers, but will rise early, curtailing her sleep in order that no one may complain that she gives to exercises of piety time that ought to be devoted to domestic employments. If the habits of the family, and circumstances of time and place permit, she hastens to church to assist at the holy sacrifice, and while hearing Mass, she asks of God all that she needs, exposing to Him all her doubts, her fears, her troubles, asking for light and assistance to lead a pure, an innocent, and a holy life; renewing her protestations of love and fidelity and attachment to His service. But, if through the exigencies of her lot in life, she is deprived of this privilege, she must not be disquieted or cast down, for she knows that true devotion consists in doing the will of God.

If she is compelled to work for her living—a sentence passed by God on all the sons and daughters of Adam—or perchance has to provide for aged parents dependent upon her exertions for their means of support, she will go forth to her work without murmuring, and fulfil conscientiously her allotted task. Nor should those who are born in easy circumstances think, because they are exempted from the obligation of earning their bread, they may spend their days in idleness and frivolity. Let them find some useful occupation at home, such as assisting

their mother in her household duties, making clothes for the poor, working vestments or whatever else may be needed for the church, or preparing flowers for the decoration of the altar of Our Lady. And while employed in this manner let them raise their hearts to God from time to time, with fervent ejaculations of adoration and love, asking His blessing on all they do.

Towards her parents, the Child of Mary must show herself a model daughter, loving and respectful, obedient and willing; in her intercourse with those outside the family circle she should be modest and agreeable in manner, equable in temper, never allowing a word that might offend to pass her lips, or even a contemptuous smile to play around them. Her friends need not be many, but to those she has she should be faithful and affectionate, edifying them alike by her good example and her pious conversation. She will permit no earthly attachment to absorb her thoughts, remembering that her heart, with all its affections, belongs to God alone; she will receive reproof in silence, even if it be unjust, bear humiliations in patience and affronts without sign of resentment. If her health be good, let her thank God for this favor and redouble her zeal in His service; if visited by sickness, let her say with holy Job: "Blessed be the name of the Lord."

And at the close of a well-spent day, before retiring to rest, the devout Child of Mary will return thanks for the blessings of the day, make a brief but careful examination of conscience, ask pardon of God for her slackness in fulfilling the promises of the morning, and give Him thanks for having preserved her from greater faults. Then, her mind full of holy thoughts, she will lie down to sleep, and her guardian angel will watch over her during the hours of night.

It will now be clearly seen that the practice of true devotion does not consist in a multitude of prayers and

pious exercises; that it is not an arduous obligation, only to be entered upon by a few favored souls, but a duty suited for all, binding upon all. Who will not love, who will not follow the devout life? It is, indeed, decried by the world, depicted in dark colors, represented as a gloomy and melancholy life, a way beset with thorns and briars; but who will believe what the world says about it?

Whatever the state to which God calls you, do not neglect the practice of devotion. Practise it lovingly, practise it generously, even when this costs you trouble and involves sacrifices, remembering that it gives value to your every action, it renders your soul fair in God's sight, it guides your steps in the path to heaven. And if discouragement steals into your heart and takes possession of it, raise your eyes on high, and behold how many holy virgins, under circumstances the same as yours, have so sanctified their life as to merit to be raised to the altars of the Church. This will inspire you with fresh energy; you will ask yourself: "If they could do so much, why should not I do likewise?" Then your feelings of discouragement will be dispelled, difficulties will be overcome, the repugnances of nature will vanish; or if they remain, it will be only to render your struggle the more meritorious, to enhance the glory of the crown which God reserves for devout souls.

SERMON VIII.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND PRAYER.

If there is one thing above all others which the Christian maiden ought to have at heart, one thing which she ought to pursue with all the force of her will and the energy of her mind, it is undoubtedly the acquisition of virtue and perseverance in the same until her life's end. Yet such is our frailty and so many our temptations, that try as we may, it is impossible for us to acquire virtue, to persevere in virtue, unless we send up our sighs and prayers to our bountiful and merciful God, from whom all succor and solace comes.

Prayer is the mighty weapon wherewith we can combat and put to flight our spiritual foes; the golden key wherewith we may unlock the inexhaustible treasury of the Divine Heart and draw from it the graces we need in this life's pilgrimage. It is, moreover, the link that connects heaven with earth, that binds us to God; the mystic ladder Jacob saw, whereby our supplications ascend to Paradise and bring back to us its richest fruits; it has a power which, if we may so speak, forces the hand of God, an omnipotence which prevails even with the Most High: *omnipotentia supplex.*

Would that I could inspire all of you Children of Mary with the love of prayer! Space forbids me to say the half of what might be said, what ought to be said, on this subject; I shall, however, make it the theme of three conferences. In the present one, I shall set before you the need and the efficacy of prayer; and on a future occasion speak of the method of prayer, or the conditions of

prayer; lastly, I shall treat of that kind of prayer which is known as mental prayer.

What, then, let me ask, is prayer? The Catechism tells us that prayer is the elevation of the heart and mind to God, to praise Him, give thanks to Him, and ask of Him those things whereof we stand in need. It is a perfume, ascending from earth to heaven; a fragrant incense that our souls offer up to God, and which returns laden with the graces we most desire; it is a celestial nourishment indispensable to the maintenance of our spiritual life, without which the soul languishes and dies.

This being so, who will dispute the supreme necessity of prayer? Our Lord Himself declares that without Him, left to ourselves, we are incapable of taking a single step in the way of salvation. "Without Me you can do nothing." St. Paul tells us that without the assistance of grace we cannot so much as think a thought that is good. And the doctors of the Church teach us that in the ordinary dealings of Providence, God does not give grace to those who do not ask for it. "Ask," He says, "and you shall receive." This is equivalent to saying: "I am always ready to bestow My grace upon you, on condition that you ask Me for it." Hence we see that the Christian who does not pray cannot live the life of grace.

Not only does our divine Redeemer inculcate upon us the necessity of prayer, of asking, in order that we may obtain. He desires, moreover, so earnestly that we should fulfil this precept that He would have us never relax our efforts. "Men ought always to pray and not to faint." He is not content with impressing this duty upon us by verbal teaching alone, He enforces it with His example. During the years of His hidden life at Nazareth He was constantly in prayer; the forty days of seclusion in the desert, before commencing His public career, were given

to prayer; we read that He prayed before working His most striking miracles; He prayed in the Garden of Olives, on the Mount of Calvary. What does He do now in the Holy Eucharist, but remind His eternal Father of His abasement, plead with Him for us, avert the chastisements due to our sins? And seated on His throne at the right hand of the Father, He still makes intercession for us, He is still our great Advocate and Mediator.

The Fathers of the Church all concur in exhorting the faithful to be diligent in prayer. As God has ordained, says St. Thomas, that we should obtain bread by sowing corn, wine by the cultivation of the vine, so He wills that by means of prayer we should receive the graces necessary to salvation. St. Charles Borromeo declares prayer to be the beginning, the means of development, the perfection of every virtue. St. Alphonsus does not hesitate to declare that he who prays will be saved; he who prays not, will be lost. Prayer is as essential to the supernatural life as respiration is to the natural life; without it our piety, our virtue will wither and die; unless we watch and pray the treasure of grace will be reft from us. The Christian's life on earth is a perpetual warfare; if he lays down his arms, that is, if he ceases to pray, that moment he is lost, he is led captive by sin.

Remember St. Peter, that great apostle, the ardent lover of his divine Master. He gave way to drowsiness, he neglected prayer in the hour of temptation, and the result was that he denied his Lord. The most important of all graces, that of final perseverance, could be claimed by no man as a right, not even did his purity equal that of the chastest virgins, his penance that of the most austere penitents, his fervor that of the most zealous saints, his courage that of the most heroic martyrs. Final perseverance is a special gift of God, only to be won by prayer; pray earnestly, therefore, that you may obtain it.

Do not tell me that your household duties, your daily

avocations, leave you little or no time for prayer. Prayer is a duty, a necessity ; therefore, time must be found for it. Think not that it will interfere with your home duties; prayer is, as we have seen, an elevation of the heart and mind to God, and surely we can raise our hearts to God in the midst of our ordinary occupations. It is not necessary to fold your hands, to bend your knees, to prostrate yourself before some sacred image. You need not go to church in order to pray, you need not even withdraw to some place where you will be alone ; you can pray while engaged on your work. It is enough if now and again you raise your thoughts, your heart to God, thanking Him for His benefits, beseeching Him to bless you and watch over you ; for God in His infinitude is in every place, He is ever ready to hear you and help you.

If we truly love any one, how often we think of him, how constantly his image is present to our mind! Everywhere we seem to see him, to hear his voice, nothing can make us forget him. Love God, and your thoughts will turn naturally, spontaneously to Him ; and doubt not that at all times, in all places, you will reach His ear, you will feel Him nigh.

Nor was there ever a time in which prayer proved inefficacious. Turn over the pages of Holy Scripture, and you will see how true this is. We are told that Moses prayed, and the waters of the Red Sea were divided to let Israel pass in safety, while the hosts of Pharao were submerged in the torrent. Josue prayed, and the day was lengthened to allow him to defeat the five confederate kings of the Amorrhites. Judith prayed, and courage was given her to cut off the head of Holofernes, and deliver her country from its haughty oppressor. David prayed, and he obtained patience and resignation in all the sorrowful vicissitudes of his career. Jonas prayed from the depths of the sea, and he found mercy of the Lord. The three Hebrew youths who by

Nabuchodonosor's command were cast into a furnace of burning fire prayed, and the fire had no power over them, so that not a hair of their heads was singed. Susanna, the victim of a shameful calumny, condemned to be stoned to death, prayed, and the prophet Daniel was sent by God to proclaim her innocence and confound her accusers. When the extermination of the Jewish people had been decreed, Esther in her distress prayed to the Lord, and He touched the heart of Assuerus, so that the nation was saved.

And in the New Testament, instances too many to be enumerated are found: Saul of Tarsus prayed, and from a persecutor he became a fervent apostle; the woman of Samaria prayed, and Christ gave her the water of eternal life; the sisters of Lazarus prayed, and, though he had been dead four days, their brother was raised from the grave; Magdalen prayed, and she was forgiven; the Canaanitish woman prayed, and her request was granted; even Dionias, the penitent thief, prayed, and Paradise was promised to him. All Our Lord's miracles likewise were wrought in answer to prayer—the healing of the lepers, of the man born blind, of the centurion's servant, of the deaf-mute, of the widow's son, the multiplication of the loaves, the stilling of the tempest, and the miraculous draught of fishes. Look through all the succeeding centuries and never will you meet with an instance, in matters of private concern or of public interest, in which prayer has been offered in vain. By prayer, obdurate sinners have obtained pardon, the afflicted relief, the persecuted succor; the sick have been restored to health. Prayer disarms the divine justice, appeases the divine anger, disposes almost at will of the treasures of divine grace. It is *suppliant omnipotence.*

Let us see that we make good use of this great power which God has placed in our hands. Remembering that prayer alone can open to you the blissful portals of

heaven, do not let a day pass without raising your heart to God in earnest supplication. Let prayer be your first act on awaking in the morning, your last act before going to rest at night. And during the intervening hours of the day, let not your heart be mute; from time to time, in the midst of your occupations, turn your thoughts to God, offering to Him your work and your sufferings, begging Him to watch over you and keep you from anything that may offend Him.

And if some pleasure falls to your lot, thank Him who of His bounty confers it on you. If trials and crosses—abounding as they do in this valley of tears—are your portion, think of the humiliations and ingratitude He met with who was holy, just, the Creator and Ruler of the world, and your afflictions will seem light, you will bless the hand that strikes you. Begin your work with prayer and end it with prayer; pray before your meals and after your meals; pray in the moment of temptation, in the hour of danger. In a word be instant in prayer. Above all do not neglect to pray that you may obtain the gift of prayer; bear ever in mind the words of St. Alphonsus: "He who prays, will be saved; he who prays not, will be lost."

SERMON IX.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND THE METHOD OF PRAYER.

In the preceding sermon we have seen the necessity and the efficacy of prayer; we will now consider the manner in which we ought to pray. The woman of Canaan, of whom we read in the Gospel, shall be our teacher, our model in the art of praying well; no better one can be found in the whole of the Scriptures. From her we can learn much, much that will be very profitable to us; for he who prays well is certain of eternal salvation.

The first lesson to be learned from the Canaanitish woman is the order in which we ought to proffer our petitions. Firmly convinced of the omnipotence of our divine Lord, she draws near to Him; and what does she ask of Him? Long life, honors, riches? No; her daughter is grievously tormented by a devil, and it is on this account that she approaches Jesus; yet she does not beg Him to cure her, she cries: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David" (Matt. xv. 22). Her own spiritual needs are of primary importance; she knows that she is in bondage to the devil, and she deems it to be more necessary that her soul should be delivered than that her daughter should be cured; consequently she implores grace for herself in the first place, confident that the rest will be given to her in addition.

This, then, is the first rule which we must follow in our prayers: to ask graces of God in the proper order. You know there are two kinds of blessings in this world: spiritual blessings, which concern the eternal salvation

of the soul, and temporal blessings, which are good in themselves if a proper use is made of them, but otherwise may hinder us rather than help us in the attainment of our final end. Now, if the Christian is not wrong in asking temporal benefits of God in prayer, such as physical health, the welfare of his family, the success of his private affairs, yet above and before all he ought to implore of God spiritual graces: humility, detachment from earthly things, purity, patience, meekness, steadfastness in what is good, and perseverance in grace.

Is this, let me ask, the order you observe in your prayers? Do you seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice, as Jesus Christ commands us? That is to say, do you ask of God grace to fulfil your duties aright before you ask Him to prosper your worldly business? Do you ask for the health of the soul before you ask for that of the body, for the bliss of Paradise before the pleasures of earth? If so, you do not observe the proper order in your petitions; you show that you prefer the husk to the grain, the leaves to the fruit, paste jewels to real gems. And then, whether or no He grants your prayer, the Lord will say to you, as He once said to the mother who asked a position of honor for her sons: "You know not what you ask" (Matt. xx. 22).

Beware, then, lest you deceive yourselves. Spiritual benefits, the conquest over your passions, progress in virtue, these are the graces you ought to ask of God, to ask unreservedly, unconditionally. Temporal favors are only to be desired in as far as they will promote your eternal welfare; accept them with filial gratitude when, in His paternal charity, God bestows them on you as proofs of His love. And if He does not grant your petitions, do not vex yourself, do not grow impatient and angry, God has your best interests in view; it is a sign that it is better for you that what you ask should be withheld. Thus the careful mother refuses to give her child the

knife for which he is crying, because she knows that were she to put it in his hands he would only injure himself with it.

The second condition requisite for praying well is to have recourse to God with full confidence of being heard. Behold the woman of Canaan. No sooner did she hear where Jesus was to be found, than she abandoned all human help, she placed all her trust in Jesus, and confident that she would find in Him the succor vainly sought elsewhere, she drew near to Him with unwavering faith. God requires that we should pray with like confidence if we would be heard. Those who pray with diffidence prove that they have but little faith in Him who is all-powerful, all-merciful; they show that they do not look upon Him as the kindest Father, the most sincere Friend, the most beneficent Ruler, and this in truth He is. This lack of confidence is most displeasing to Him; it is a wrong we do Him, and He is constrained to reject our petition as unworthy of being presented to Him.

He, therefore, who desires to be heard, must pray with confidence, with faith. If he wavers, as St. James tells us, that is, if he is not guided and sustained by faith, he will be inconstant like the fluctuating waves of the sea, and will obtain no grace from God.

The publican in the temple obtained the grace he implored because he asked with faith and humility. The ten lepers came to Jesus with full confidence, crying: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us," and as they went away they were healed. The blind beggar on the way to Jericho, hearing that Jesus was passing by, of whose wondrous power and kindness he had been told, exclaimed, in the conviction that He would restore his sight: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" and he obtained the favor he desired.

Let us not doubt, therefore, that the prayer of faith is

all-powerful with the heart of Jesus. The heart speaks out of its own fulness, and speaks a language to which God cannot refuse to listen. If our prayers were always animated by such potent faith, we could, as Our Lord says, remove mountains. Therefore, we repeat, in the words of St. James: "If any of you want wisdom, let him ask of God; . . . but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering" (James i. 5, 6). Confidence, is then, the second requisite of our prayer.

Let us once more observe the woman of Canaan. She does not merely proffer her request with her lips; the cry: "Lord, have mercy upon me," comes from the depth of her heart, it is the outcome of lively fervor. Hence we see what is the third quality indispensable to prayer; it must be fervent and devout.

"Let your prayer," says the Psalmist, "ascend like incense to the throne of God." But incense does not emit its secret fragrance, unless it is put upon fire. So it is with prayer; if we desire that it should rise up to heaven like incense, it must come from the altar of a heart burning with the sacred flame of charity and fervor. What carelessness it shows, says St. Cyprian, to allow yourself to be distracted by idle and irrelevant thoughts when at prayer, as if it could possibly be right for your mind to dwell on anything else when you speak to God! How can you expect Him to pay any heed to your words, if you do not heed them yourself? Will He remember a petition which you yourself cannot remember? Such negligence is an offence to the Divine Majesty; your eyes may be open, but your heart is asleep. No prayers said from habit, with voluntary distractions or that come from a cold heart, can ascend to heaven and find favor in the sight of God.

We may, it is true, often have involuntary distractions in prayer, which arise solely from the frailty and infirmity of human nature, and these we must struggle to over-

come. But how often our distractions are due to our own inadvertence and indifference! How often we deserve that God should say to us, as He did to the Jews of old: "This people honoreth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me" (Mark vii. 6).

But if our petitions, presented in right order, inspired by faith and devotion, are still unanswered, we may learn from the woman of Canaan a fourth, an infallible, means of obtaining our request: perseverance in prayer. What did this poor mother do when Jesus went on His way heedless of her entreaties, declaring them unworthy of His attention? She did not turn away reviling Him, she did not even utter a complaint; she persevered all the more for the repulse she had received. Acknowledging her unworthiness of His benefits, she besought them all the more earnestly, until at last Our Lord fulfilled His promise that those who ask aught shall obtain, those who seek shall find; turning to her with infinite kindness, He answered: "O woman, great is thy faith, be it done to thee as thou wilt." And from that hour, through the merit of her prayer, the devil ceased to torment her daughter.

Thus we see that persevering prayer at last surmounts every obstacle, reaches the ear of the God of all mercy, and obtains for us the help we need: "God," says St. Gregory, "loves to be entreated. He desires us to compel Him to hear us. Therefore if you ask and do not obtain, knock more loudly; God only withholds His gifts that we may clamor more urgently; He makes as if He would repel us, in order that we may become more earnest and eager in our supplications."

Persevere therefore, O Child of Mary, in your prayers, and do not ever grow weary. "We ought always to pray and not to faint," Our Lord says (Luke xviii. 1). What parent could deny to his child a favor that was earnestly, persistently besought? Could you yourself refuse a

dearly loved friend to fulfil the request she implores of you? God, who is our best Friend, our loving Spouse, our tender Father, will not be less generous; He may delay for the sake of increasing our ardor, enhancing our virtue, but ultimately He will not fail to grant our persevering petition.

Let me exhort you, then, to kindle anew in your heart the spirit of prayer. Pray first for your spiritual gifts; pray with faith, with fervor, with perseverance; pray aright, pray without ceasing, never grow weary of prayer. Prayer will teach you the emptiness of the world, it will fortify you against the temptations of the devil, it will increase your love of heavenly things and revive in your heart the fire of divine charity. Above all, prayer will be your consolation in grief, your solace in the hour of death, a pledge and foretaste of your eternal felicity.

SERMON X.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND MENTAL PRAYER.

THE prayer of which we have hitherto spoken has been vocal prayer; we have seen the necessity of prayer, the efficacy of prayer, and the manner in which we must pray in order that our petitions may be granted. There is, besides, another method of prayer, known as mental prayer, meditation or contemplation, most conducive to sanctity and profitable for the spiritual life.

"Do you desire," asks a learned and pious writer, "to save your soul and to keep your heart free from the stains of sin? Do you desire to know how you stand with God, what are your obligations in regard to Him, and how you fulfil those obligations? Do you desire to understand aright the mysteries of the faith you profess, the hopes held out to you, the terrible judgments that threaten you? This knowledge can only be acquired by means of meditation."

Those who know little about religion, and many good Christians too, have a very false idea of the importance of meditation. They imagine it to be an exercise intended only for religious, or persons who lead a life of retirement and good works, and not for those who are obliged to spend their days in the busy world. In this they are mistaken, greatly mistaken; in fact, the very reverse is the truth. For those persons who are habitually recollected, whose surroundings recall to their mind the presence of God, have less actual need of meditation than others whose position compels them to give their attention to a multitude of secular matters. These latter really experience

the necessity of now and again searching into their own heart, of thinking seriously of God, of the state of their soul, of the life to come, if they would attain eternal salvation.

First of all let us inquire what is meant by meditation. Meditation is a serious, attentive, and loving consideration, in the presence of God, of some truth of our religion, with the object of arousing within us corresponding affections, desires, and resolutions. It is a mental exercise wherein the understanding grasps the truth on which we meditate, penetrates and searches it out, so that it may sink into the heart and influence the will.

We have but to turn to the Holy Scriptures in order to learn the importance of meditation. Our Lord, after days spent in active ministry, passed the night oftentimes in prayer with His eternal Father. He impressed upon His apostles the necessity of withdrawing to some secluded spot to take spiritual repose: "Come apart into a desert place, and rest a little" (Mark vi. 31), He said to them, when there was much arriving and going of the people. He told Martha, when she was too much concerned about her household affairs, that one thing alone was necessary, and commended Mary for having chosen the best part. It is said of our Blessed Lady, whose whole life was one continual practice of the most perfect mental prayer, that when first she began to co-operate in the redemption of man, she kept in her heart and meditated upon all that she had heard from the lips of the aged Simeon. The Baptist prepared himself for his mission as Precursor of the expected Messias by long years of solitude, of austere penance, and lofty contemplation. And when St. Paul (1 Cor. xiv. 15) says: "I will pray with the spirit, I will pray also with the understanding," does he not allude to the practice of mental prayer?

We learn from the pages of hagiology that in all ages by means of mental prayer chosen souls have at-

tained the most eminent sanctity. All the saints inculcate it upon the faithful; St. Alphonsus de Liguori said that whoso did not meditate upon the truths of eternity could not live a Christian life, but would walk in darkness. St. Teresa, the great pattern of mental prayer, declared that he who neglected meditation did not require to be thrust down to hell by the devil, he would fall into the abyss of himself. Hence we see that there can be no good Christians, not to speak of holy souls, who do not take delight in meditating upon the truths of religion; nor is there any other devotional exercise which will prove equally efficacious in preserving us in a state of grace. "Remember thy last end," Holy Scripture says, "and thou shalt never sin" (Ecclus. vii. 40).

Would you know the reason why so many professing Christians pass months and even years in a state of mortal sin, apparently heedless of their danger? It is not because they do not believe the truths of religion; with few exceptions, they all keep their faith, they believe in death, judgment, and eternity. Why, then, do they lose their souls? The prophet Jeremias (xii. 11) tells us: "With desolation is all the land made desolate, because there is none that considereth in the heart." Sinners go on unto perdition because as they never reflect upon the truths of eternity, they are not deeply impressed with the awful consequences of sin. If one were to ask the damned how it is they are in hell, they would answer: "Because we did not think about hell." St. Chrysostom says: "No one who kept the thought of hell before his mind would ever fall into it." And St. Teresa assures us that there is no religious exercise that the devil strives so much to hinder as meditation, for he knows that the soul who gives herself to it will never fall into his clutches.

Believe me, there is in the spiritual life no more cogent means of preserving ourselves from sin than the practice of meditation. Every other means: vocal prayer,

frequenting services, confession, even holy communion, are not incompatible with a state of sin. There are, alas! many souls who hear Mass and approach the sacraments, and yet whose lives are an almost unbroken round of serious sins. But a state of sin and frequent meditation are two things that can no more co-exist than ice and sunshine, darkness and light.

Therefore if you are desirous of ridding yourself of some evil habit, of eradicating some unruly affection from your heart, of conquering some dominant passion, you will find in meditation the most efficacious means. It is a shield against the up-rising of the flesh, which always rebels against the spirit. It is a weapon wherewith to repel the assaults of our spiritual foes, who will never leave us in peace. It is a light which, discovering to you the hideous nature of sin, will make you detest it, and awaken within your heart sentiments of true contrition.

What excuse, then, can be alleged for neglecting a practice of such great importance and utility? Some say they do not know how to meditate: they seem to consider mental prayer as the privilege of the few, not to be attempted by all men, both learned and unlearned. But we know that God gives the assistance of His grace to all, and more especially to the simple and little ones. Nor does meditation require great stress and application of mind; it is not, as some suppose, a painful strain on the intellect and the heart. What is it except a process of reflection and thought? And reflection and thought are demanded of each one of us in the pursuance of his daily business, whatever his calling may be. We all meditate in one way or another on everything that interests us deeply; well, let us substitute the Creator for the creature, one of the fundamental truths of religion for the transient interests of earth, making this the subject of our thoughts, our aspirations, our affections, and there we have meditation in its true significance.

Those who declare that they do not know how to meditate, may learn much from the following incident narrated by an able and experienced priest: "In the exercise of the sacred ministry," he says, "one often meets with surprising instances of how good Our Lord is to those who seek Him. Once when I was preaching a mission in a village, a child about six years old came to my confessional. I heard her confession, and just as she was going, as it is my habit to recommend the practice of meditation to all my penitents, I said to her: 'My child, try if you can make a little meditation,' she promised to do so and departed. About a week later, the same child came again: before she began her confession, I asked if she had made a meditation? 'Yes, Father,' she replied. 'You are not speaking the truth,' I rejoined. Seeing that she began to cry on finding I did not believe what she said, I added: 'Tell me what you did.' 'I went into my room,' she answered, 'and drew down the blinds, so that I might not see out of the windows. Then I knelt down at the prie-dieu, and took the crucifix in my hand, I looked at the crucified Jesus from His head to His feet, I thought how much He must have suffered when the crown of thorns was pressed into His temples, when He was nailed to the cross, and so on. Then I said: "Who was it, Lord, who treated Thee so cruelly? Alas! It was I, by my sins. Forgive me, of Thy mercy, I will do so no more." That was the meditation I made, Father.' This simple recital brought tears to my eyes. And that was a little girl not more than six years of age."

Others say they have not time for meditation. Look at the examples of the saints, many of whom held positions in the state involving constant work and heavy responsibility, and who yet found time to devote to mental prayer. Others again in a lowly station, who earned their bread by the labors of their hands, gave themselves every day to meditation on holy things. Your various occupa

tions may make meditation a difficult task for you, and in the case of important duties you are right in leaving it in order to perform them. But under ordinary circumstances, is it so hard to find a few minutes in the day to look into your own heart? A meditation of an hour, or half-an-hour's length is not required of you, as it is of religious; you will, however, derive no small profit by devoting eight or ten minutes regularly every day to mental prayer; surely this is no such difficult matter, it depends on your own determination. The old proverb says: "Where there's a will, there's a way."

Others again will say: "I tried to meditate, but it was only waste of time, I got no good from it, my thoughts wandered, my heart was cold."

Know that distractions and aridities in prayer are either voluntary or involuntary. If they are voluntary, that is, if you allow your thoughts to wander instead of resisting the distraction, your meditation will produce naturally not the fruit it otherwise would have. The fault is your own, it is the result of weakness of will. Struggle against it, and you will derive great profit from your meditation.

If, on the other hand, distractions and aridities are involuntary, they are permitted by God to test your courage and will not render your prayer fruitless. It is easy to love God and meditate upon His perfections amid sweetness and consolation of spirit. And if God wills that your way should lie through a desert, do not on that account grow weary of meditation. Wait in patience; either the aridities will pass away, or they will be an occasion of merit; God will reward your perseverance and fidelity with His choicest graces.

Listen then no longer to the pretexts the devil suggests to deter you from this most profitable exercise; impress upon your mind the words of St. Teresa: "I would entreat those who are strangers to this salutary

practice of meditation no longer to deprive themselves of so great a boon."

Remember that we have seen mental prayer to be the most efficacious means of avoiding sin and awakening the love of holy things. Let it be your delight, your constant practice. And if by your own fault you have passed a day without devoting any time to mental prayer, say, in the words of St. Alphonsus: "This is a lost day in my spiritual life."

SERMON XI.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND HOLY MASS.

No act performed upon earth is so sublime, so worthy of our highest veneration, as the adorable sacrifice of the Mass. This sacrifice is a real and true repetition of the passion and death of our divine Redeemer; it is the selfsame act that took place upon Calvary when He immolated Himself for our salvation, and by His death blotted out the handwriting of the decree that was contrary to us, restored us to the state of grace lost by Adam's fall, reconciled us with God, and constituted us heirs of heaven. It was this sacrifice which David, speaking in prophecy long ages before, designated as the sacrifice of justice, because the victim was supremely just and holy, nay, justice and holiness itself. This sacrifice, it is in which, as St. Paul says: "Christ has delivered Himself for us as an oblation and sacrifice to God for an odor of sweetness." This sacrifice it is which the wondrous charity of Our Lord, solicitous to devise means for our salvation, instituted in order that all might participate in the fruits of His passion and death; for this He multiplies the oblation of Himself countless times every day and in every place, offering Himself up for the living and for the dead, for the just and for sinners, for the individual and general needs of mankind, for our temporal and eternal welfare.

Innumerable indeed would be the graces which souls might obtain for the present life and for the life to come did they appreciate aright the immense treasures contained in holy Mass. But, alas! familiarity with the Holy

Eucharist, the constant renewal of the sacred mystery upon our altars day by day, and many times a day, has diminished its value in our eyes, has lessened our veneration for it. Is this ingratitude or indifference on our part? Both the one and the other.

Let us then quicken our faith; let us fix our thoughts upon this holy sacrifice, and learn something of its surpassing excellence, of the blessings to be derived from it. I am aware that to speak on such a subject the tongue of an angel, not of a man, is required: but I will do my utmost, in the hope of increasing your devotion towards the adorable sacrifice of the altar.

The accomplishment of the work of redemption, the salvation of the human race, that masterpiece of divine mercy, did not content the loving heart of Jesus. He foresaw that despite His passion and death, sin would again acquire undisputed dominion upon earth; He foresaw that notwithstanding the graces offered to mankind they would still take delight in iniquity; notwithstanding all His benefits they would forget what His love had done for them, they would set at naught His precious blood; and therefore, in the excess of His charity, He willed to remain among us, to immolate Himself anew for us every day, a victim of expiation for our sins, imploring mercy and pardon for us. In the holy sacrifice of the Mass, as once upon Calvary, He offers for us His tears and prayers. He disarms the just anger of God, and calls down upon earth celestial benedictions. Thus the sacrifice offered upon Calvary is continued and renewed day by day in holy Mass; the oblation of the cross and the oblation of the altar are identical: the Victim is the same, the Priest is the same, only the manner of offering is changed; in the sacrifice of the cross, Our Lord shed His precious blood, whereas the sacrifice of the altar is without shedding of blood. This is the rainbow, the sign of peace, of the eternal covenant God made

with man; this is the blood of the Paschal Lamb, that caused the Angel of Death to pass by; this is the pure and spotless Victim which alone is acceptable in God's sight.

What a stupendous act, therefore, is the holy sacrifice of the Mass. Who, if he does but reflect upon it for a moment, will not feel himself overwhelmed with profound amazement, with the utmost reverence! Whose heart will not glow with the ardent desire to draw nigh to this Victim of mercy and charity, Jesus Christ Himself, immolated upon our altars; to be present at the celebration of this sublime mystery, wherein a God is the sacrificial victim, the sacrificing priest; wherein it is the voice of God Himself who speaks to the faithful, who calls upon them, addressing them as brethren, to lift up their hearts on high; and, when the bloodless sacrifice is ended, does not let them depart out of His presence without bestowing on them His choicest benediction.

What more can be said of the privileges, the profit we derive from this sacred sacrifice? St. Thomas says that the principal duties we owe to God are four in number: To honor Him, give thanks to Him for His benefits, appease His anger, and ask of Him the graces of which we stand in need. Now all this is done in the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

Our first duty is to honor Him. It is a law of nature that every inferior should pay homage to his superior, and the higher the position of the superior, the greater is the respect due to him. But what adequate tribute of respect can we offer to our Creator and sovereign Lord, since His eternal and infinite majesty can only be rightly honored by worship and adoration of an infinite nature? Were we to offer to God the best of our substance, the powers of our souls and bodies, nay, our life itself, our oblation would still be imperfect, unworthy of One who is infinite in His perfection. We should have nothing

wherewith to pay our debt, did not God Himself provide us with the means of honoring Him in a meet and fitting manner. In the holy sacrifice of the Mass we offer to God a victim proportioned to His infinite grandeur; we offer to the Supreme Deity a God equal to Himself; but we offer this victim in a state of abasement, of self-annihilation, of concealment beneath the species of bread and wine. We offer with Him all the merits of His passion and death, consequently we offer to God a holocaust of infinite value; we perform an act of homage not unworthy of His sovereign sanctity; we render Him greater honors than if we offered Him the love of all the seraphim, the labors of all the apostles, the blood of all the martyrs, the purity of all the virgins, the penances of all the elect; in a word, we offer Him the most exalted honor that it is possible for the Supreme Deity to receive.

The second obligation we are under is worthily to give God thanks for the benefits He confers upon us from day to day.

Not only has God created man, giving him a position a little lower than the angels, making the earth fair for his sake, but He has redeemed him with His blood, rescued him from the perdition his sins deserved. Surrounded as we are by countless mercies, how can we thank our God as He merits to be thanked, how can we sufficiently display our gratitude! It is impossible for us to do this of ourselves; we can but say with the patriarch Jacob: "Lord, I am not worthy of the least of all Thy mercies, I am incapable of thanking Thee for them as I ought, even were I to sacrifice myself entirely to Thy glory, and to give up my life in Thy service." But, praise be to God, in the holy sacrifice of the Mass we have the means of offering to Him an act of thanksgiving not inferior in magnitude to the favors we have received from Him. Presenting to Him as we do, Jesus Christ Himself, with all the merits of His passion and death, we can confidently approach

Him, and say: "O Lord, my God, I confess that Thy mercies are indeed infinite; yet, here is a gift which is equivalent to Thy gifts; I offer to Thee a God, an oblation of infinite virtue, worthy of Thyself, a meet requital and acknowledgment of the countless blessings Thou hast bestowed and dost bestow on me day by day."

In the third place, holy Mass is a sacrifice of propitiation, whereby we are enabled to appease the divine wrath provoked by our trangressions. What, we may well ask, would become of us but for the pure and clean oblation which, as Malachias prophesied, is offered in every place from the rising of the sun even until the going down; what would become of us, but for the precious blood sprinkled upon the earth to cleanse it from the flood of iniquity which threatens to overwhelm it? How is it that God, who formerly rained down fire to destroy whole cities because their sins had become exceedingly grievous, now bears with such long-suffering and patience the wickedness and crimes, the blasphemies and scandals that are multiplied upon this earth? It is because of our loving Mediator and Advocate, Jesus Christ in the sacrifice of the Mass, who interposes between an angry God and a sinful world, appeasing the divine justice, disarming the hand that is uplifted to strike. It is the blood of this innocent Lamb, who comes to take away the sins of the world, shed anew upon our altars, which cries aloud: "Father, forgive them," and restores the sinner to the grace, the friendship of God. Not that the Mass in itself has the power to deliver from mortal sin, this is only done by the Sacrament of Penance. But it cancels it indirectedly, by obtaining for us the grace of contrition, the assistance necessary to make satisfaction for sin.

Finally, in the holy sacrifice of the Mass, we may procure from God all the blessings we need both for soul and body. Our Lord Himself says that if we pray aright, and ask in His name, we are certain to be heard.

And in holy Mass, we not only pray in His name, but He prays for us, He presents our petitions to His heavenly Father. And if we know not what we should pray for as we ought, He "Himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings." Hence, it may be said that the sacrifice of the altar is a fountain whence flow graces and blessings in richest abundance. Happy those who draw from this source! It is a treasure that delivers us from all evil, and enriches us with all manner of good things, it is the key of heaven. St. Bernard tells us that by hearing one Mass we may gain more than by giving all our substance to the poor, or by going on a pilgrimage to the most celebrated sanctuaries in the world.

Seeing, then, how great is the virtue and excellence of holy Mass, who would not endeavor to assist at it daily, in order to reap from it fruits so unspeakably precious? Shall we, through carelessness or sloth, deprive our souls of the graces granted to those who hear Mass devoutly? While our loving Lord, the Victim of charity, immolates Himself day by day upon our altars for our salvation, amid hosts of adoring angels, let us not embrace any pretext for absenting ourselves from this stupendous manifestation of Divine Mercy, this highest act of Christian worship, the central act of religion, the mainspring of piety and devotion.

Hasten, then, daily to assist at holy Mass, with feelings of deep reverence and holy awe. Make the sacrifice, at the foot of the altar, of your passions, your evil habits; commend yourself fervently to God in prayer, commend to Him your interests, your wants, your work, your friends; plead for sinners, for the Church, for the faithful departed.

And if you are prevented from hearing Mass in person, do so in spirit, in desire, and doubt not that God, who is ever generous to those who love Him, who think of Him, will reward you abundantly, both in this life and in that which is to come.

SERMON XII.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND VISITS TO THE BLESSED SACRAMENT.

THERE is a pious practice of which the human tongue is unable to speak worthily; a practice commended to us by the exhortations of the Church, by the example of the saints, and in which every true Child of Mary ought to take delight. I refer to the daily visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

Let us turn our eyes, my dear children, to the sacred tabernacle. There, under the appearance of a morsel of bread, Jesus Himself is truly present; that very Son of God who became incarnate by the operation of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, who was laid as an infant in the manger at Bethlehem, who died upon the cross, who rose glorious and triumphant from the grave, and ascended into heaven, where He is the joy of angels and saints, the object of their unceasing praise, benediction, and worship: Jesus Himself who, after having immolated Himself for our sake and given Himself to be the food of our souls, does not depart from us, but wills to remain in our midst, day and night ever present in the tabernacle, in order that it may be easy for us to draw near to Him, to converse with Him in familiar intercourse, to pour out our hearts before Him. There, in that consecrated Host, imprisoned in the tabernacle, is Jesus, the beloved of the eternal Father, the sweet Son of Mary.

When Our Lord announced to His disciples that He was about to leave them and return to His Father in

heaven, from whom He had come, He promised that He would not forsake them; He would not leave them orphans here upon earth, but that He would abide with them until the consummation of ages, though they would be deprived of His visible presence. This promise was made to us in the person of the apostles, and it is fulfilled every day in the Adorable Sacrament of the Altar. From the sacred tabernacle Jesus speaks to us as He did to His disciples: "Be not troubled, My children, I will not leave you orphans; do not think because I have returned to My celestial country, that I am lost to you, for at the same time I am with you, in the sacrament of My love. I know that you are weak, that you are sick, that you are often in affliction; but in Me you will find a Father to help you, a Physician to heal you, a Guide to direct you, a supernatural nourishment that will infuse into you fresh power. Do not be afraid: I shall abide with you every day until the consummation of the ages."

Thus Our Lord makes Himself our Guest; as if heaven were not enough for Him, He desires to make His dwelling-place on earth, in our very midst. Behold and marvel at the means His charity devises in order to satisfy the ardent longings of His loving heart. He might have remained among us as resplendent in glory and majesty as He is in heaven, so that man approaching Him could not fail to recognize His divinity. He might merely have visited us at rare intervals, and remained but a few moments with us; and, fortunate, indeed, would those have deemed themselves who were privileged to behold Him at such happy moments! But He knew how frail we were; He knew that grandeur and majesty would strike terror into us, as it did into the Hebrews at Mount Sinai; that, like Adam after the fall, we should hide ourselves from the visible presence of our God. Therefore, He, who loved us so fondly, who desired to abide with us, abased Himself, annihilated Himself, concealed the

splendor of His divinity beneath the species of bread, the most common and familiar thing in the world. This God of bounty and loving kindness works a miracle to conceal His Godhead; He covers with the eucharistic veil all that might hinder us from approaching Him, and there in the lonely tabernacle, a prisoner of love, He waits day and night for us to go and bear Him company for a few moments.

Had we not the infallible word of God on which to rest our faith it would be impossible to believe that the love of Jesus was carried to such a point as to make His abode with us for all the time, and even to take pleasure in so doing: "My delights are to be with the children of men." And were we to spend our whole life in perpetual adoration before Him, it would be but a poor return for such an excess of mercy and divine charity.

Yet the souls who respond to the invitation of our loving Lord to visit Him in the Blessed Sacrament are not many in number. On week-days a few persons go to the church at the hour of Mass, but the rest of the day the churches are comparatively, if not quite, forsaken, except perhaps for the presence of some poor woman or old man. How many are the hours wasted in going from house to house, seeking the acquaintance of persons with whom to while away one's time; how many are the hours spent in talking of one's affairs, in transacting business, and not one quarter of an hour can be spared for Our Lord, to relieve the tedium of His solitude, to pay Him respectful homage. How many are the days devoted to society, to amusements, and to pleasure, while Jesus is left alone and forsaken, the one in all the world least thought of, least known! His house is left to Him desolate. What grief, what sorrow this must be to His loving heart! He delights to dwell among His children, He calls them, He invites them to come to Him, and they are cold, deaf

to His voice, heedless of His solicitations. Finding Himself thus sadly neglected, is He not warranted in addressing the same words of reproach to us as to the apostles in the Garden of Olives, who slept during His agony: "Could you not watch with Me one hour?"

Well it is that hosts of angelic spirits come down from Heaven to praise and magnify Him! But for them Our Lord would too often be utterly abandoned, with no companion save the sanctuary lamp, burning day and night, a symbol of the Sacred Heart that throbs with the desire to have us near Him; an emblem of the ardent love that ought to inflame our hearts with earnest longing to seek His presence.

And not only ought the yearnings of the Heart of Jesus to attract us to the tabernacle: the consciousness of our own great needs ought to be a powerful motive to urge us to go thither.

There is no necessity for me to remind you how profound is our misery, how strong is our inclination to evil, our disinclination to what is good, how numerous are the dangers and seductions that encompass us, how subtle are the snares our enemies spread for us, how relentless is the war which the world, the flesh, and the devil wages against our souls. Now in all this peril who will help us, who will support us, if not our blessed Lord, who, present in the Adorable Sacrament of the Altar, thinks of us, watches over us, lives for us? Hear Him speaking to us, from the sacred tabernacle: "Come, all you who thirst, for here is the fountain whence flow the waters of life eternal; come, all you who are poor, for here is the treasury, whence the divine riches are freely dispensed."

Since then there is nothing here on earth so valuable, so precious to the Christian soul as Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, will you not endeavor to visit as frequently as possible this celestial Friend who so graciously awaits your coming, that you may enjoy the blessings He is

ready to bestow on you; speak to Him heart to heart, lay at His feet your trials and troubles? Go to Him when your foes assail you, tell Him what you need, cry to Him: "Lord, help me or I perish!" and He will give you strength not only to resist the temptation, but to advance with more energy on the path of holiness. Go to Him when you feel weak and inconstant, bewail your frailty before Him, tell Him your desire to belong only to Him, and drawing near to this furnace of charity, you will feel your heart glow with divine love. Go to Him when afflictions weigh heavily upon you, when you experience the want of a trusted friend to whom you may open your heart and obtain relief from your burden. You will find no friend so faithful as Jesus, the world will not, cannot give you the solace that He will give. Go to Him who says: "Come unto me all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you." He is the God of all consolation; you will leave His presence more tranquil, more patient, more ready to bear bravely the troubles of this life, even if the sorrow of your soul is not turned into joy. Go to Jesus to implore His aid to fulfil your duties, grace to keep your heart pure, courage to surmount obstacles and increase in the fear of God. It matters not whether your visits be long or short, He will always receive them gladly. And as when He was on earth there emanated from His sacred body a virtue which cured every malady of the soul and of the body, so from the sacred Host that selfsame virtue will go forth, potent now as then to heal infirmities, to dispel, sorrows, to strengthen the weak, to pour out grace and healing and life upon all who draw near in humility and faith.

Let your visits to the Blessed Sacrament be your dearest devotion, your greatest privilege. Our Lord desires them, longs for them, He dwells in the tabernacle as on a throne of mercy, of love, of bounty; pay Him your homage,

present your petitions; offer to Him all the thoughts of your mind, the affections of your heart, your whole self; invoke His aid, implore His benediction, ask for His peace. And, like Magdalen, who, seated at Jesus' feet, heard His words, do you listen to His voice, when, in stillness and solitude, He speaks to your heart and enters into converse with your soul. In the presence of the Adorable Sacrament of the Altar, says St. Alphonsus, you may gain more in a quarter of an hour, than you will gain by all your other spiritual exercises during the day.

Do not say that you have no time for these visits, and that you are too busy. Even though your day may be fully occupied, can you conscientiously say you have no time to spare? Think how many hours are spent in visiting your friends, how many minutes wasted in idleness! And those who go daily to work, might surely on their way thither or when returning home pass a few moments in the church. If this should cost a slight sacrifice, who would grudge it for the glory of God and her soul's salvation? Nor must you tell me that in Our Lord's presence words fail you, you have nothing to say. You have no lack of words when you talk to your parents and your friends, and have you nothing to say to Him who is more to you than the kindest of parents, the best of friends? If our faith were real and lively, time would not be wanting to visit Our Lord, nor words to converse with Him.

"How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!" exclaims the Royal Psalmist; "my soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord. Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house, O Lord, they shall praise Thee forever and ever. Blessed is the man whose help is from Thee."

And to you I say: Blessed is the Child of Mary, who in the silence of the sanctuary, in the company of angels, kneels in devout recollection before the tabernacle. While in all humility, her heart glowing with the love of

Jesus, she tells Him her troubles, her temptations, her griefs; through the veil of the sacrament He looks upon her with complacency, He blesses her, and calls her His beloved child, for His delights are to be with the children of men.

SERMON XIII.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND THE DAILY EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE.

ALTHOUGH all our spiritual exercises aim at the extirpation of vice and the acquisition of virtue, there is one which is pre-eminently useful and most efficacious in cleansing the soul from its vicious tendencies and causing it to produce the choicest flowers of virtue. Our soul is by nature a barren plot of ground wherein thorns and thistles grow and flourish. Now we know that if we want to have a well-kept garden, it is not enough once for all to have the stones cleared away, the ground dug up, seeds sown, flowers planted out, and then to leave it alone; it will require continual attention, the young plants must be watered, the superfluous shoots must be cut off, and the weeds rooted up; so, in the same way, if we desire virtues to spring up in our heart, it will not suffice to eradicate our bad proclivities and subdue our passions, it will be necessary to watch over it with the utmost vigilance, lest our perverse propensities, the evil concupiscences of our fallen nature should again come to the fore. And for this no better means can be employed than the examination of our conscience, for by thus searching out daily the faults into which we fall, we shall discover the subtle snares of the devil, and then it will be far easier for us to combat them, and to effect a complete and radical reform of our interior life.

So true is this, that if there is one pious exercise from the practice of which the devil exerts himself most strenuously to deter us, by inspiring us with distaste and

aversion for it, it is this whereof we are now speaking, for he is well aware of the salutary results produced in the souls of those who perform it regularly; nor can it be said that his efforts are futile, for not many Christians have the force to resist the temptation, and examine their conscience regularly every night.

I intend to-day, first to set before you the usefulness and the importance of daily examination of conscience, and then give some practical suggestions as to the manner of making it.

The examination of conscience consists in recalling to mind, at the close of the day, the number and nature of the faults we have committed during its course, in order to correct them. This definition is in itself enough to demonstrate both its ability and its necessity.

We are, as you know, God's creatures, intended to be happy with Him for all eternity, but only on the condition that we fulfil the duties He lays on us both towards Himself, our sovereign Lord, and towards our fellow-men; and on this will depend our admission to or exclusion from Paradise. Now how are we to know whether we fulfil those duties or not, unless we frequently and with careful attention, look into our own heart and scrutinize our actions, to see where we have failed—unless we grieve over our want of fidelity to God's commands, and resolve to do better in future? We have received, and constantly do receive, countless benefits from God, both for body and soul, of which we ought to make use to promote His glory and our own salvation. How can we know whether we make the right use of these graces, if we do not examine our actions and count up our loss and gain?

Any one who approaches the sacraments frequently, must of a truth necessarily examine his conscience tolerably often, at least whenever he goes to confession. But although I am far from wishing to underrate the value of this examination, for it suffices to preserve us from fall-

ing again into grievous sins, yet it certainly does not avail to keep the soul free from lesser transgressions of the law of God, from omissions of the duties of our state. It is not enough to cleanse the soul now and again, by a good confession, from vicious tendencies, from the stain of sins we have committed ; we must by a careful examination of conscience return to clear the soil of our heart from the weeds which day by day spring up afresh, to quench the flame of passions which ever blaze out anew ; unless we do this our soul will gradually become deteriorated, like a house which if left unrepaired by degrees becomes a ruin, or a plot of land, which without culture soon produces nothing but weeds. The number of our venial sins, whereof we are hardly aware, will increase ; from the lesser we shall pass on to the greater ; venial sins will grow to mortal. Many souls now groan despairingly in the lake of fire, because they would not take the trouble to search into their own heart, to scrutinize their conscience.

We find all the saints and spiritual writers urging strongly upon the faithful the duty and necessity of this pious practice, as the best means of advancing in what is good, and of avoiding evil. Nor do they inculcate it by their teaching only, it was their own constant and diligent habit, and the founders of orders made it obligatory upon their religious as being greatly conducive to a life of perfection. This was done in Syria by St. Basil, one of the first to give a rule to monks ; St. Anthony in Egypt ; St. Augustine in Numidia ; later on in Europe by St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, and, not to mention others, by that great luminary of the Church, St. Ignatius. He practised this pious exercise himself from the day when he consecrated himself to God until the day of his death, and he prescribed it to his followers, saying he could not understand how any one could aspire to sanctity who did not keep his eye fixed upon his own heart and examine his

every action. Even the sages of antiquity recognized the value of this daily scrutiny: Pythagoras enjoined it on his disciples, and both Cicero and Seneca expressly state that at the close of each day they reviewed their words and actions during its course, allowing nothing to pass unnoticed, and resolving where they saw they had been at fault not to err in like manner again. Having seen how indispensable this daily examination is for the development of the Christian life, we will now pass on to the practical consideration of how it should be made.

There are two kinds of examination, the general and the particular; the former is concerning the faults committed during the day, the latter regards one virtue or vice only. This is why it is called the particular examen. We shall speak of the general examination as being of more consequence, and also because what is said of it can be applied to the other also.

The masters of the spiritual life tell us that if we would derive profit from this exercise we should, first of all, place ourselves in the presence of God and make an act of faith and adoration, thanking Him for the blessings we have received from Him, especially in the past day, and imploring light to discern the faults of which we have been guilty. We must then make a careful examination of conscience, not glossing over any sin into which we have had the misfortune to fall, however trifling it may appear. Having done this, let us make an act of contrition for our offences against God, acknowledging and deploring our misery, but without allowing ourselves to be unduly depressed and despondent; and then firmly resolve not to commit any deliberate fault. On this, Rodriguez says, the greatest stress should be laid, for in our sorrow for sin and our determination to avoid it, consists the hope of amendment.

The three points for examination are these: our de-

votional exercises, the virtues of a Christian life, and the duties of our state.

Let us begin by examining ourselves respecting our devotions, and ask ourselves: Have I said my accustomed prayers night and morning with attention and recollection? Have I made my meditation with the care so salutary an exercise demands, choosing the subject most suited to help me in the spiritual life? If I have been to communion, how did I prepare myself for it, and how did I make my thanksgiving? And my visit to the Blessed Sacrament? Have I frequently and fervently uttered ejaculatory prayers? Have I performed all the religious exercises enjoined on me, or which I have undertaken of my own accord, and how have I performed them?

With respect to the virtues becoming to the Christian, let us ask ourselves: What has been my conduct in regard to the mortification of my senses, both at home and abroad? Have I observed custody of the eyes, to avoid seeing anything that might be suggestive of evil, or have I let my wandering glances stray hither and thither? And if, perchance, I have heard profane or indecorous conversation, have I shown my disapproval, or laughed and made light of it? Have I been temperate in eating and drinking, or have I thought only of pleasing my palate? Have I said what was untrue, or indulged in unseemly talk or jesting?

In regard to my exterior: Have I been modest in my demeanor, my dress? or have I loved display, and to make an appearance? Have I wished for vain and unnecessary personal ornaments?

In regard to humility: Have I banished from my mind thoughts of vainglory and self-esteem? Have I prided myself on any gift of God, spiritual or corporal, and delighted in the praise of men? Have I said anything to my own advantage, courting esteem and honor, or

have I rather shunned them? Have I been haughty or arrogant towards my inferiors?

In regard to charity: Have I performed rash or uncharitable judgments of my neighbor? Have I stifled feelings of aversion, envy, jealousy, cultivating the opposite virtues? Have I shown kindness towards those who have injured me, or whom I dislike? Have I spoken bitterly, or angrily of my neighbors, ridiculed or slandered them? Have I complained of, and published the failings of any one, censuring his actions, placing an evil construction on them, instead of excusing and defending them as far as possible? Have I repeated his speeches or complaints, thus creating discord instead of promoting harmony and peace? Have I been ready to forgive offences, and render assistance, either temporal or spiritual, to my neighbor whenever occasion presented itself?

In regard to patience: Have I spoken impatiently, acted or spoken angrily? Have all my words and actions been meek and gentle?

In regard to obedience: How have I behaved towards my parents and superiors? Have I been disobedient or disrespectful? Have I obeyed willingly, promptly, without questioning?

In regard to conformity to the will of God: Have I accepted the crosses laid on me as coming from the hand of God, and borne them without murmuring? Have I never grown restive under the burden of misfortune or sickness?

In regard to purity of intention: Have I said or done anything to win the esteem of men, to get my own way, or to satisfy some passion, instead of making the glory of God and my own salvation my only motive and aim?

Finally: Have I fulfilled exactly and conscientiously all the duties of my state of life, and performed my work without wasting time?

Such are the questions we should ask ourselves every

evening before retiring to rest. And for those who, being weary with the day's work, or pressed for time, should find this examination somewhat long, I will suggest a shorter and easier method. Let them pass in review each hour of the day, one after another, asking themselves what they have done or left undone; what they have thought or said; where they have been and with whom?

Thus if there has been anything wrong in the day, it will not escape notice; then ask forgiveness of God, determine to go to confession as soon as you can, and to avoid the same fault for the future.

Although the general examen is most profitable as a means of subjugating the passions and rooting out vicious proclivities from the soul, yet this work cannot be done all at once. The masters of the spiritual life counsel us, therefore, to direct our attention specially to one particular predominant fault. This is called the particular examen; and experience proves that if one fault is extirpated, the others will be more easily overcome.

Let the daily examination of your conscience, therefore, be your habitual practice, and you will see how rapid will be your progress towards perfection. Not only will you succeed in eliminating from your soul its faults and shortcomings, conquering them with facility, but you will render your heart pure and fair in God's sight. Do not lose heart if you fall again into the same sins; this is permitted in order that you may realize your own frailty, and learn to mistrust yourself. Persevere in the work with regularity and exactitude, and rest assured that your faults will shortly be conquered, the practice of virtue will become less difficult, and you will become model Christians, on whom Heaven will bestow its choicest gifts.

SERMON XIV.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND A DAY OF RETREAT.

AMONG the pious practices binding upon the Children of Mary, which are specially conducive to perfection, the day of retreat holds a prominent place. This consists in setting apart one day in every month to be devoted exclusively to the affairs of the soul, to be spent in converse with God and our own hearts for the purpose of ascertaining what are the defects to be corrected, the virtues to be acquired or perfected; the day is to close with certain practical resolutions, the generosity and efficacy of which will depend upon the fervor wherewith we have made the retreat.

Pilgrims, as you are, in a world where you are surrounded by so much that is evil and corrupt; exposed to the danger, through bad example, of losing that most precious yet fragile gift, the grace of God, there is nothing better calculated to check all inordinate attachment to the vanities and pleasures of the world, all inclination to lend an ear to its false but flattering enticements, than this day of retreat. In it we concentrate our whole attention upon the all-important work of our own salvation; we hear the voice of our God speaking to us in clearer, more penetrating accents, as He Himself tells us by the mouth of His prophet, our soul is more open to receive and obey the divine inspirations and promptings.

In order to stimulate those who are already in the habit of keeping this day of retreat to derive greater profit from it, and to incite those who have not yet adopted the practice to neglect it no longer, I shall en-

deavor to show how useful it is, and how the day should be spent.

All the holy Fathers and spiritual writers agree that to make a retreat—whether it be one day or several—is the most certain way of accomplishing the work of our salvation. For at such times the consideration of the truths of religion has greater power to excite within us the love of virtue, the hatred of vice; we recognize more forcibly the vanity of earthly things and the value of heavenly things; and God vouchsafes to speak to our heart words unheard amid the clamor, the disturbance, the distraction of the world, words that, falling like drops of dew on the thirsty plant, refresh the soul and cause it to delight in truth and justice.

Under the Old Dispensation it was always in solitude and seclusion that God spoke to His servants the patriarchs and prophets; and it was in the retirement of the desert that the Precursor was fitted for his great mission, and received the power to become greater than the prophets. In the stillness of the cenacle the Holy Spirit descended upon the little band of disciples under the semblance of tongues of fire, endowing them with celestial gifts and creating them anew. The earlier life of Our Lord may be called a continual retreat; after seven years spent in exile in Egypt, He led a hidden life at Nazareth; and previously to commencing His public career, He withdrew to the desert, where He passed forty days in prayer and fasting. During the three years of His public ministry, we are told that He retired frequently to some lonely spot, or spent whole nights in prayer and contemplation; and when about to enter upon His passion, He withdrew apart from His chosen apostles; not to speak of His repeated injunctions to His disciples to recollect themselves in some solitary place, from time to time.

We have, moreover, the example of the saints, who, the more closely they walked with God, the more they

felt the necessity of a spiritual retreat, whence they came forth more enamoured of humility and patience, more inspired with contempt of the world and of themselves, more valorous to undertake the most arduous labors, the most costly sacrifices that charity could dictate. You would do well to imitate them, though their retreats were not such as yours—for the space of a single day—but prolonged during weeks and even months. Still, if you persevere in devoting one day in every month to prayer and meditation, you will make rapid progress in the path of holiness.

Here, I must warn you against a danger. It may be that the devil, desirous to impede the good which you might derive from this salutary practice, may suggest to you that a Child of Mary, who takes no part in vain amusements and worldly dissipations, needs it not, since her life is more or less a continual retreat; whereas, it is all very well for young persons, votaries of pleasure, who pass days in forgetfulness of God and the affairs of their soul. Listen not, my children, to the father of lies; believe me, whether you are among the number of the tepid or the fervent souls the day of retreat cannot be otherwise than highly profitable to you. If you belong to the former class, in silence and prayer you will become better acquainted with your own heart, and with the obligations that rest upon you: you will be enlightened to discern your backsliding, your infidelity to grace, your daily faults, the liberty you have allowed your senses, the ascendancy your passions have gained over you. In silence and prayer you can fan to a brighter flame the fire of divine love; you can acquire strength for the better performance of your duties; while the truths on which you meditate will serve to keep you from relaxing your efforts and guide you in the path of holiness, and the Holy Spirit will illuminate your mind and confirm your good resolutions.

Nor will the day of retreat be of less utility to fervent souls. "He that is just, let him be justified still; and he that is holy, let him be sanctified still." These are words spoken by God Himself, and they plainly imply that we must always go forward on the way of perfection: that to stand still is to go back. Our Lord proposes to us the infinite perfection of His eternal Father as the object of our imitation: "Be you perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect." Are you in reality fervent? Do you not often pray with wandering thoughts, a distracted mind? You often go to confession, and yet are always the same. You receive the Bread of Angels; do you do so with purity of conscience, lively faith, ardent desire? Are your daily duties always performed with exactitude and right intention? and are your religious exercises always attended with the profit that might be derived from them? "Moreover, what clock is there," asks St. Francis of Sales, "however good a one it may be, that does not require to be often wound up, and also occasionally repaired or cleaned, and the works oiled, that it may keep time correctly? Thus, whosoever is really concerned about his soul, ought not to content himself with fortifying it by devotional exercises each night and morning, but many times besides he will make a careful examination of every part, that is to say of the affections, the desires, the passions, in order to correct what he sees to be amiss and promote the increase of good resolutions and Christian virtues."

Having seen how profitable the day of retreat may be to the Child of Mary, whether she be one of the tepid or the fervent, we must now consider the manner of making this retreat, since it is of comparatively little use to make it unless it be made well.

On the eve of the day fixed, which, according to the rule of the Children of Mary, is the Saturday preceding the first Sunday of the month—liable, however, to be

changed if circumstances should render this necessary—it will be advisable for you to recite your night prayers with special recollection and fervor, so that your petitions, ascending to Heaven, may draw down upon you the divine blessing in copious showers; then make a careful examination of conscience. As soon as you wake the next morning raise your heart to God, and call upon the holy names of Jesus and Mary, in whose presence you hope to spend the day; offer your whole self to God, thinking that this may, perhaps, be the last day of retreat you will ever make.

Take for the subject of your meditation the four last things, or some other fundamental truth which may have more attraction for you, endeavoring that this meditation should be marked by greater recollection, greater care, and, above all, greater confidence in God than usual. Desire earnestly to discern what God would have you do, and resolve to accomplish whatever may be His will. Somewhat later read a portion of a spiritual book, and make your monthly examen with the help of the Manual, wherein you will find enumerated your duties towards God, towards your neighbor, and towards yourself. In the afternoon go to the church to visit Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and pour out your heart before Him in fervent acts of love and adoration; let this visit be a model of all others which you will make—if possible, daily—during the month. Afterwards meditate upon the preparation for death as if you were about to appear shortly before the tribunal of Christ; ending with familiar colloquies with your crucified Lord, holding in your hand the crucifix, kissing it, and commending your soul to God as you would wish to do when upon your death-bed.

Prepare for your monthly confession, which you will make on the evening of the day, disclosing to your director all the secrets of your soul; or you may prefer to make it the next morning before holy communion, with which

you will close your retreat. During your thanksgiving renew your good resolutions; do not let these be too many or too general, and determine to fulfil them faithfully, even though this may cost you some sacrifices from which self-love may shrink. It is not requisite that you should abstain during the whole day from following your ordinary occupations; if your circumstances permit you to remain in solitude, so much the better, but this is not necessary.

Therefore, Children of Mary, see that you observe this day of retreat every month, fruitful as it is in good results for all who wish to make their eternal salvation sure and profitable, more especially for you who are compelled to live in the world, in constant contact with much that is evil. By means of this excellent practice, I repeat, you will, if you have become somewhat lax, revive the spirit of faith and piety within yourself; and if you are already fervent, you will grow more pious and persevering and be united to God by a closer and more intimate bond.

SERMON XV.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND THE IMITATION OF JESUS CHRIST.

THE first duty of the Christian is to follow Christ and imitate Him, since this is the only way whereby we can attain eternal salvation.

When our divine Lord had washed His disciples' feet after the Last Supper, He said to them: "You call Me Master and Lord; and you say well, for so I am. If I, then, being your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet; for I have given you an example that so I have done to you, so you do also." This is tantamount to saying: "No man can be My disciple unless he imitates Me; and as the scholar learns of his teacher, so you must learn of Me; learn from My actions even more than from My words, from My example more than from My precept. Study My life and copy it, that is the task I set you; that is what you must do if you would reach the kingdom of heaven."

Thus Jesus Christ instructed us to regard Him as the great exemplar, the sole model of perfection; and from that time forth all who entered upon the heavenward path have endeavored to make their lives a copy of His, to walk in His steps. You too, my children, ought to strive to imitate Jesus Christ. It is not enough to listen to His teaching; it is not enough to abandon yourself to His guidance, to express your belief in Him, your love for Him; you must imitate Him, you must renounce the world and the ways of the world that most men follow, and enter upon a life modelled after His, to which the

maxims of the world, the fashions of the world are entirely opposed. Your mind must be the mind of Jesus, your will must desire what He desired, your heart must throb in harmony with His heart, in a word, your whole being must reflect the image of Jesus so closely that all who see you may say, this is a daughter of Mary, see how she strives to imitate the Son of Mary.

Whatsoever be the road by which a soul may walk on the way to heaven, Jesus Christ will be her guide, her pattern ; for, as Holy Scripture declares, there is no other name in heaven or on earth whereby men can be saved. "Christ suffered for us," says St. Peter, "leaving you an example, that you should follow His steps." Our Lord Himself said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life," and no one can attain life unless by following that truth and walking in that way; that is to say, by following the example He sets us. The gospels, the epistles, all speak of the imitation of Christ, inculcating it upon us as the indispensable duty of every Christian. "As many of you," says St. Paul, "as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ." And the saints and Fathers of the Church all declare that he alone deserves the name of Christian who in all his thoughts, in all his actions, reflects as far as possible the life of Christ.

Hence it may be said that our religion consists in the imitation of Jesus Christ; and the Christian, keeping ever before his eyes the life of Christ, will remember the words He said: "I have given you an example, that as I have done, so do you also." And truly were this not so, what need would there have been for our divine Lord to live among us for thirty-three years, to show Himself to us under circumstances so varied, to perform so many good works? To redeem mankind, to satisfy the divine justice, one tear, one prayer on His part would have sufficed, for a single prayer, a single tear of Him whose majesty is infinite would have been infinite in value, in-

finite in satisfaction. Why should He have chosen to lead among us a life of labor and suffering from the moment of His birth until His latest breath, if not for the purpose of giving us a visible, a practical, example, to which all who call themselves His disciples are bound to conform.

Thus it is evident that the imitation of Christ is obligatory upon every Christian, and none can hope to be among the number of the elect who is not found in conformity with the one, true Head of the elect. Nor is it enough for the Christian to forsake sin; he must advance a step further. He must change his mode of thought, his manner of acting, so as no longer to live in accordance with the canons of the world, but as one who obeys the law, who imitates the actions of Christ, his great exemplar. Then, like a painter who in copying a picture is not content with merely impressing upon his mind the outline, the light and shade, the blending of colors in his copy, which he hopes to reproduce upon his canvas, but at every stroke of the pencil turns to look at the original before him; so if any doubt arises concerning a thought or act, we ought to turn our eyes to our divine Model, and ask ourselves whether our ideas, our deeds, our conduct, are conformed to His thoughts, His deeds, His conduct; whether we esteem what He esteemed, despise what He despised, love and hate what He loved and hated. In a word, can we say with the Apostle: "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me."

Is it so with you, my children? Do you fulfil this obligation, and strive to resemble Jesus Christ? Are you patient as He was? obedient as He was? kind and charitable to all as He was? Do you abhor sin as He did? Jesus, poor, homeless, persecuted of men, hopes that He may still be able to regard you with complacency and to find in you some compensation for the ingratitude met with elsewhere! Surely your heart will afford Him a

resting-place, a dwelling where He will be undisputed Master! For if He does not see His image reflected in you, who profess to lead a devout life—who as Children of Mary, His Mother, claim to be His sisters, His spouses —what probability is there that He will find it in the votaries of the world, who are not His friends but His enemies?

And even if the imitation of Our Lord appears to you somewhat difficult and arduous, be patient and persevere. The saints, speaking from their own experience, tell us that it is not so; and we see not only strong, resolute men following Christ, but weak, timid women. Here is an instance in point:

In a poor but Christian family there was a girl about twelve years old, who was unusually quiet and composed for her years. Every one remarked her unassuming, modest behavior, her obedient conduct, her gentle manner. In fact, her parents said she was really like an angel. One day the priest of the parish, astonished to find such sanctity in one so young, asked her to tell him how she had learned to make such progress in virtue. At first she colored and evaded the question, but on being pressed to reply, she answered:

"Jesus Christ is my book. I read no other, and I need no other; this is the use I make of it:

"When I wake in the morning, I think of the Infant Jesus, who, on being born into the world, offered Himself as a holocaust to His eternal Father. In imitation of Him, I offer myself as a sacrifice to God, consecrating the day, and all I may do in the day, to Him. When I say my prayers, I think of Christ at prayer, adoring His heavenly Father, and I unite myself in spirit to Him. When I am at work, I remember that Christ toiled and grew weary in the workshop at Nazareth, and, far from complaining, I unite my labors to those of Jesus, with loving resignation to the will of God. When

I am ordered to do anything, I remember how Jesus obeyed our blessed Lady and St. Joseph, and I imitate His obedience. If what I am told to do is irksome, I think of Jesus submitting to the death of the cross to save sinners, and then I willingly undertake my task, however difficult it may be. If any one speaks against me, or reviles me, I keep silence and hear it in patience, remembering how Jesus suffered accusations, calumnies, and cruel tortures without murmuring, although He deserved nothing of all that was laid on Him, whereas I am a sinner and merit far worse treatment.

"At my meals, I think how Christ took food to enable Him to promote the glory of His Father. If I have anything to eat which is distasteful, I think of the gall given to Our Lord upon the cross, and make a sacrifice of my sensuality to Him. At my recreation, I remember how kindly, how condescendingly, He conversed with His disciples. When I lie down to rest, I think how He only took rest in order to gain fresh strength to do His Father's work; I say to myself that my bed is very different to the cross, whereon He hung three hours in agony, and I fall asleep with His words on my lips: 'Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.'"

Here we see how this poor girl contrived to follow Christ without much difficulty. How could it be otherwise, since He Himself, who is very Truth, assures us that the yoke He lays on His followers is light; and that He will help us to carry it, for He does not leave us to ourselves, to our own strength, but after having gone before to show us the way, He encourages us to follow in His steps, supporting us with His grace, assisting us to persevere.

And even if the imitation of Christ should be an arduous task, we must apply ourselves to it none the less, for, unless we do so, it is impossible for us to attain eternal salvation. He imposes on us this indispensable

condition when He says: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by Me." As if He would say (so the Fathers explain these words): "I am the only sure way that leads to salvation, and no one can be united to My heavenly Father in this life, or hope to enjoy His beatific presence in the life to come, unless he believes in Me and imitates My example." He also declares the necessity of following Him if we would enter into heaven, when, on being asked that the two brothers, James and John, might sit, one on His right hand and the other on His left, in His kingdom, He answered: "Can you drink the chalice that I shall drink?" meaning that, in order to share in His glory in heaven, it was requisite to take part in His sufferings on earth, to imitate His example.

This is, indeed, a universal law for all the elect; an obligation from which you certainly are not exempt. The Apostle tells us it was necessary for Christ, who is our Head, to suffer, and so to enter into His glory, and thus it is necessary that His followers should enter into heaven by means of great tribulations, by following His example and suffering for love of Him all that Providence sends them which is repugnant and bitter to nature. There is no doubt about it; if you would be saved, this is the only way. Our Lord will not alter the rule He established, nor depart from His own immutable word.

I do not mean to say that Our Lord bids us imitate Him in all His perfection; what He asks of us is far short of that. He permits us to enjoy the good things of this world, provided we use them, as the Apostle says, as if we used them not; that is to say, keep our heart detached from them, use them with moderation. He does not require us to go in search of sufferings and humiliations; He only desires us to be patient and resigned under the trials and crosses inevitable in this life. And as He was obedient to His heavenly Father unto death,

even the death of the cross, so we must live in obedience to His commandments, to the laws of the Church, submitting to all that He may appoint.

Now, seeing the imitation of Our Lord to be our bounden duty, since it is indispensable to our salvation, you must ask yourselves: How have I done this hitherto? Time flies; day by day we are hastening to the grave; when my last hour comes, what likeness to His divine Son will God find in me? What hopes can I entertain of my eternal salvation? And if any among you perceives your life to offer little or no resemblance to that of Our Lord, if your conscience reproaches you, determine henceforth to make His life the pattern of your own in every thought, word, and deed. Turn to Him in faith and say to Him: "Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou shalt go; for Thou art the way, the truth, and the life."

SERMON XVI.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND HUMILITY.

THERE is a structure far more precious in the sight of God than any external edifice raised by human genius to His glory, and that is the edifice of your perfection. It is the work of years, of a lifetime; your parents, your religious teachers and superiors have helped to raise it, you yourselves strive continually to add to it by fresh virtues. But have you paid sufficient attention to the foundation on which all these virtues must rest—to humility? If not, there is great reason to fear that the whole fabric will ere long fall. See to it, then, and if needs be, construct a sure and solid basis before it is too late.

Humility, St. Bernard tells us, is a virtue which, by acquainting man with his own misery, not only prevents him from becoming proud, but makes him vile and contemptible in his own eyes. Therefore, to be truly humble, it is not enough to be conscious of our own misery, to acknowledge that all the good in us comes from God; it is necessary to be so thoroughly convinced of this truth as to feel no complacency in ourselves or in any esteem shown to one, but to give all the glory to God, and to God alone.

Although we know that all virtues are pleasing in God's sight, yet we do not hesitate to assert that humility is more pleasing to Him than any other. Was not the life of Him who came to earth to be our Master and Example one continued series of humiliations, from His cradle to His grave? Behold how He, who for long ages

was the expectation of the nations, whose coming was looked for as that of a sun to enlighten the world, of a monarch to rule His people, was born in obscurity, of poor parents, so that none knew of His advent. Instead of appearing, as was anticipated, amid splendor and glory, He began His earthly career in a stable, open to the wintry blasts, and was laid on a bed of straw in a rough manger. He allowed Himself to be circumcised, as if He were one of the sinful sons of Adam, and when the cruel Herod sought to slay Him, He fled into Egypt. For more than thirty years He lived in the lowly workshop of a poor artisan and was known by no other than the humble name of the carpenter's Son.

This love of humility showed itself in Him more and more. If any one addressed Him as "Good Master" He replied: "None is good but one, that is God." If He worked miracles, He forbade those present to speak of them. If the people, recognizing Him to be the promised Messias, proclaimed Him their king, He hid Himself from them. And when He went up to the feast at Jerusalem, He entered the city in the lowliest manner, seated upon an ass.

And what were the humiliations to which He subjected Himself in His passion! When He was struck on the face by a ruffianly soldier, in the presence of the judges; when He was spit upon, scourged, mocked, and reviled by a low rabble; when, by Herod's orders, He was arrayed in the robe of an idiot; when Barabbas was preferred to Him; when He was condemned by Pilate to be crucified, like the lowest criminal, between two thieves.

Nowhere, indeed, do we meet with so illustrious an example of humility as in Jesus Christ. Even now, when He lives in the Church and in the souls of her children, what is His life but one of profound self-abasement? He is present upon our altars, concealed under the lowly appearance of

bread and wine; He is present in the soul of the Christian under the mystic veil of grace, working in a hidden and secret manner. Such humility is in truth unparalleled.

This love of humility is no less strikingly manifested in Our Lord's teaching. Nothing does He impress so forcibly upon those whom He destined for the apostolic ministry as to beware of pride. "Learn of Me," He says to them, "for I am meek and humble of heart." When investing them with supernatural powers He warns them not to think much of themselves on that account: "He that is greater among you, let him become as the younger; and he that is the leader as he that serveth." And when the disciples returned from their mission, rejoicing because the devils were subjected to them, He again admonished them in the same strain, bidding them rather rejoice because their names were written in heaven, and reminding them of Lucifer's fall through pride.

It was because our blessed Lady loved humility, and practised it in so high a degree, that, for the sake of that very virtue, she was chosen to be the Mother of God. The apostles were all men of pre-eminent humility, and the saints of all ages have been remarkable for their lowly opinion of themselves. And lest you should deem the example of these great servants of God too exalted for your imitation, let me tell you of a simple and obscure Lay-Brother whose very name is unknown.

The celebrated painter Rubens one day visited the Escurial, that masterpiece of architectural art, once a far-famed monastery, which stands on an eminence overlooking Madrid, the capital of Spain. Accompanied by a Lay-Brother, Rubens was inspecting the church with its fifty altars, when his attention was arrested by a fresco-painting of the crucifixion, exhibiting rare genius in the design and execution. Stretched on the ground, at the foot of the cross, the figure of a monk was depicted, with

these words on a scroll below: "Here lies the painter; pray that he may ever remain dead to the world."

For some time Rubens stood motionless, contemplating this picture; then turning to the Brother in a transport of admiration, he exclaimed: "Who is that Brother? This Christ is magnificent, it is painted with a master's hand. Pray tell me the name of the artist." "Let him rest in peace," the Brother answered; "he is dead to the world; let him, as he wishes, remain so."

The visitor persisted in his inquiries, and finding his companion still refused to satisfy his curiosity, he declared, that, as the prior had given him permission to go where he wished, he would enter every cell in search of the gifted artist. "The work is quite recent," he said; "I shall find the implements of the painter somewhere, and discover him I must."

At these words a slight color tinged the cheek of the religious, for his was the work that elicited such enthusiastic admiration from Rubens; his was the figure portrayed at the foot of the cross, dead to the world, to all things; for he was possessed of equal humility and talent. Before commencing his task, he had prayed God to preserve him from the least taint of vainglory; he had entreated his superiors and fellow-monks not to breathe his name to any one. And now, hearing that the visitor intended to inspect every cell in order to discover the secret, he feared lest even the shadow of pride should pass over his soul. He therefore asked Rubens to excuse him for a moment, and hastening to his cell, he closed the door behind him. There, prostrate on the ground, he kissed the crucifix, and prayed earnestly that he might die rather than become proud.

Then, taking up canvas, colors, brushes, palette, sketches, half or wholly finished, he bound them together and flung them out of the window. A rapid stream flowed below the walls; in a moment all had been borne

out of sight. The Brother rejoicing, raised his eyes to heaven: "Let them all go, my God," he said, "rather than I should offend Thee by one thought of pride." Then he returned to resume his duty as cicerone.

Since humility is a virtue so fair, so dear to God, let us each ask ourselves whether we possess it. Would that it were so! But it must be acknowledged that this virtue is more often found upon our lips than in our lives; of all others it is the rarest, because in the spiritual conflict the most difficult victory is to conquer one's self, to subdue self-love.

Are you truly humble if you resent and complain of every trifling affront you may receive from those with whom you associate? If you delight in recalling to your mind praise and compliments, which perchance you would hardly have considered as such had they not been addressed to yourself? If, instead of concealing the gifts of nature or grace God has bestowed on you, you parade them, in order to gain the applause and esteem of men; if you boast of your parentage, your position, your relatives? If you despise others less wealthy, less gifted than yourself? If, instead of gratefully accepting counsel or rebuke, you take offence at them and attribute base motives to the speaker? No, no one is truly humble who does not follow the teaching, the example of Jesus Christ; who does not copy the conduct of the Blessed Virgin. Behold how troubled she was at the laudatory words of the angel when he addressed her as full of grace. How unmurmuringly she acquiesced in the repulses she met with from the inn-keepers at Bethlehem on account of her poverty. How meekly she bore the apparently harsh manner in which her divine Son thought fit to speak to her on several occasions, never uttering a word of self-justification. She took no part in His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, but when He was dragged out of the city as a criminal, to be crucified,

she hastened to follow Him, and took her stand beneath the cross, not ashamed to be known as His Mother.

If, then, you would be true children of God and of His holy Mother, you must acquire the virtue of humility; you must be humble in all things.

You must be humble in thought, entertaining a low opinion of yourself, ready to fulfil the lowliest duties. Humble in your desires, only anxious to love God more, and serve Him more faithfully, not caring what the world may say or think of you, if it pleases Him to send humiliations upon you. Humble in your words and conduct, especially under disagreeable circumstances, or in intercourse with uncongenial persons; not answering again when anything is said which wounds your self-love; not despising others, seeking to put yourself before them, or showing impatience at their imperfections. Humble in your prayers, for we are told the prayer of the humble pierces the clouds, and draws down graces from above. Humble in all your good works, remembering the words of Holy Scripture: "When you shall have done all that is commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants." Humble in the humiliations you encounter, from whatever source they come; saying with the Psalmist: "It is good for me that thou hast humbled me." Humble, in a word, in all things, with a real, sincere, unfeigned humility; for God is great and we are little. He is holy and we are sinners; He is all-wise, almighty, and we are ignorant and feeble.

Seeing, then, how great are our miseries, both of soul and body, have we not every reason to be humble? If we have anything good, it is the gift of God; we have nothing of our own. And on this account we ought to humble ourselves the more, the more we have received from God, lest, perchance, having greater cause for gratitude and love, we should have requited His benefits with indifference and thanklessness.

SERMON XVII.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND OBEDIENCE.

St. Philip Neri once said that all sanctity consists in the renunciation of one's own will. He spoke truly; for no one ever sanctified himself by following the dictates of his own will. Hence it is that the virtue of obedience —which consists in prompt submission to the will of one who has the right to command—is always inculcated upon us as one of the most efficacious means of making rapid progress in the path of perfection. And our divine Master, knowing its importance, not only enjoins it frequently upon us in Holy Scripture, but practised it Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; thus teaching us by His example that no one upon earth can consider himself exempt from the duty of obedience.

St. Thomas Aquinas esteemed this virtue so highly that he gave it the first place after the theological virtues. St. Augustine declares it to be the parent of all other virtues. St. Gregory the Great says that obedience either supposes the presence of every other virtue, causes them to be speedily acquired, or is the means of perfecting them.

I purpose, therefore, in the present conference to show you the excellence of obedience, how it is to be practised, and what are the benefits accruing from it; we shall then make some resolutions to fulfil the duties it lays upon us.

Obedience is a moral virtue which renders a man ready to accomplish the will and the commands of his lawful superiors, provided they are not contrary to the law of

God. It is not a counsel, but a divine precept; consequently, it is binding upon all. In no state of life can we find exemption from this law; it is universally established by God, and we have but to turn to Holy Scripture to see how the obedience we owe to the higher powers is spoken of as a virtue required of every Christian,—as also is that of the child to his parent, of the wife to her husband, of the servant to his master, of the laity to the clergy.

All the higher praises of this virtue are summed up in the love and esteem that Jesus, our great Exemplar, entertained for it, and in the fact that His life was one continuous exercise of it. It was in obedience to His heavenly Father that He came down to earth from heaven; and in His converse with men, He said: "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me"; "I came down from heaven, not to do My own will, but to obey," and many a time He declared that He had come to save the world through obedience, as Adam had lost it through disobedience. One day while He was in a house, being told that His relatives were without, desirous of speaking to Him, in order to show that obedience was due to God before all, He answered: "Who is My mother, and who are My brethren? Whoso shall do the will of My Father that is in heaven, he is My brother, and sister, and mother." These and numerous other utterances, recorded in the Gospels, show how Our Lord loved to inculcate obedience on His disciples.

And not only by His words, but by His example, did He preach this admirable virtue. His obedience commenced at His birth; throughout His whole life the will of His eternal Father was the rule He invariably followed. He subjected Himself to the law of nature, by remaining concealed during nine months in the womb of the Blessed Virgin; He conformed to the divine ordinances in regard to the time and manner of His birth. He consented to

be presented to God in the Temple, to be ransomed like a poor child, to fly from Herod into Egypt; He submitted to the helplessness of infancy; He went up every year to Jerusalem, to worship His heavenly Father, and offer Him the tribute of His humble submission. He passed His life in such perfect obedience that from all the virtues that He practised during a period of thirty years the Evangelist selects His obedience to Joseph and Mary for special mention, as if all the sanctity of the Man-God were summed up in the words, "*Et erat subditus illis.*" "He was subject to them."

Marvellous, indeed, was this obedience paid by the Eternal Word, Incarnate Wisdom, to the commands of His earthly guardians; but it is not all: when the time came which was fixed by the divine decrees, Jesus entered upon His public ministry; but the time, the manner of displaying His miraculous powers, His wisdom, and His loving-kindness, were determined by the will of His heavenly Father alone. To those who urged Him to come forward before the world, He answered that His time had not yet come; and if in Judea He restrained the ardors of His zeal, it was only because His heavenly Father had sent Him to the lost sheep of Israel alone. Through obedience He submitted to the unjust sentence given by Pilate, whose authority He recognized as lawful, notwithstanding the abuse he made of it. Through obedience, He gave Himself up to His executioners, seeing in them the ministers of Divine Justice. Thus the obedience which regulated the minutest action of His life was no less prominent in the solemn circumstances of His death.

The saints learned in the school of Christ the value of obedience. St. Teresa asserts it to be the shortest and surest road to perfection. Not only did she and many other eminent saints yield implicit obedience to their superiors, but they delighted in submitting to their in-

feriors; for they knew full well that, whatever else one may sacrifice to God—riches, honor, health, pleasure—no oblation is so acceptable to Him as the renunciation of one's own will for the sake of obedience. The martyrs, too, bore with heroic courage the severest tortures, the most cruel deaths, rather than fail in the obedience they owed to God.

We will now proceed to inquire how the virtue of obedience should be practised. In the first place we must obey promptly, because God, whether He speak by His own voice or by that of a superior who is to be regarded as His representative, must be thus obeyed. Compulsory, half-hearted, or tardy obedience cannot be pleasing to Him; He loves best those of His children who are eager and anxious to fulfil to the utmost His behests. The obedient soul will not pause to consider whether her will or that of her director had better be accomplished; she will not postpone for a single day what is enjoined upon her to do; she will not even wait until the command is formulated, she will anticipate, divine the wish of her superior. The call of obedience ought to be for her the call of God, to be listened to after the beautiful example of Magdalen, who was so absorbed in the Saviour's presence, that she scarcely heard her sister appealing to her. Or we may imitate the illustrious example of the Magi, who, seeing in the new star an indication of the will of the Most High, hastened without delay to Bethlehem, in search of the divine Infant.

Do not deceive yourselves; if you defer your obedience as long as possible, only bending your neck to the yoke reluctantly, and when no pretext can be found for not doing so, your obedience is imperfect and cannot be pleasing to God or accepted by Him.

Perfect obedience is prompt and willing; it must, moreover, be *simple*, as St. Paul says, speaking to the

Ephesians: "Be obedient in the simplicity of your heart"; that is to say, conform your will and your judgment to the will and the judgment of whosoever has the right to command you, without asking the why and wherefore of the order, or debating within yourself whether it be obligatory upon you, whether it be necessary or opportune.

To obey is to subjugate one's own reason, one's own will to that of a lawful superior; to submit one's own opinions and ideas to his; it involves the constant bending of the neck beneath the yoke, and a death to one's self by the mortification of the will and the practice of humble and complete submission. But if one begins to call in question or to criticise the commands, the actions of one's superior, farewell to all obedience! In this the cunning of the demon showed itself when he sought to lead Eve astray: "Why," he said, "hath God commanded you that you should not eat of every tree of Paradise? What reason can He have to forbid you to eat the fruit of this tree, which is so delicious?" Eve, instead of obeying with simplicity, began to question, and you know the result.

But, you will perhaps ask, ought one to obey in a blind, unreasoning manner? most certainly, for in your unreason and your blindness you are more intelligent, more enlightened than all the wisdom of the world could make you; that is, in reality you are practising true prudence, which does not rely upon one's own discretion, but upon the discretion of those who are placed over one, who, holding the place of God, receive from Him special light for your guidance. In obeying them, you obey God; and, although they may be mistaken, you cannot err in obeying, unless you are required to do something evidently wrong; God will not call you to account for what is done in the spirit of obedience. St. Ignatius tells us that the truly obedient man lets himself be dis-

posed of by his superiors like a dead man, and cannot feel, or answer, or complain, or desire one thing more than another; but may be carried hither or thither at the pleasure of another.

Peter and Andrew were casting their nets into the sea when Our Lord passed by, and bade them follow Him and He would make them fishers of men. Immediately they both followed Him unhesitatingly, unquestioningly. How many difficulties they might have raised! At least they might have asked whither they were going, how they were to be employed, what they were to be paid; not a word of this: they obeyed blindly, leaving their boats, their nets, their relatives, their friends at once.

Your superiors, your parents, may possibly, it is true, make mistakes in the commands they issue. If so, you should respectfully expostulate, but if your representations are useless, you must obey. For God commands through them, and if they are ill-judging, imperfect, unreasonable, He alone has the right to call them to account, as they act on His authority. If the commands laid on you require what is painful and humiliating, brace yourself to obey with courage and generosity, remembering that the more arduous the sacrifice your duty demands, the more pleasing it will be to God, the more meritorious for yourself.

Let us, then, love this virtue of obedience, and practise it diligently; for there is no action so insignificant, so trifling, so ordinary, that it cannot become meritorious if performed out of obedience. The saints tell us that there is more merit to be gained by obedience than in any amount of austerities, since there is no mortification so great as giving up one's will to that of another. Rodriguez says it is more meritorious to pick up a pin in virtue of obedience, than to perform any good work of our own accord.

Forget not, therefore, that this virtue alone opens the

way to a great height of sanctity. Remember, that to those only who possess it is the promise given of victory—victory over temptations, victory over our own passions, victory over the force of evil example, victory over the depression caused by calamity, victory over the allurements of the world, which seeks to enslave us. And, as the reward of these victories, triumph is certain. "The obedient man shall speak of victory."

SERMON XVIII.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND POVERTY.

"BLESSED are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." In these consoling words, our divine Master condemns, on the one hand, those who spend their strength in the acquisition of temporal riches; while on the other, He pronounces an encomium of those who are resigned to lead a life of poverty, and others who, though possessed of this world's goods, do not allow their hearts to cling to them.

It is well known that ever since the world began, an insatiable thirst for gold, and all that gold can purchase, has consumed the unhappy children of Adam. Dazzled by the bright but illusory glitter of wealth, they fall into the snares the devil spreads for them, and for the sake of the transient and perishable goods of earth, they lose the true and eternal treasures of heaven. Wherefore our divine Lord, in order to detach them from them, pronounces blessed, not the opulent, who enjoy every luxury—not the favorites of fortune, who have the means of satisfying every whim—but the poor; it is for them that the blessing is reserved.

And, certainly, if we remember that the love of riches is as much opposed to the love of God as water to fire, as light to darkness; if we consider that souls who are enslaved by the greed of worldly wealth cannot, even in thought, rise superior to the things of earth, that they too often live in perfect indifference to God and spiritual things, or, at least, think it a great matter if they attend to their religious duties on great festivals—can

we, seeing this, fail to exclaim, "Blessed poverty! happy those who have you for their companion on their pilgrimage here below"?

To-day I intend to take the praise of poverty as my theme, to show you how precious it is in God's sight, and how, in contradiction to the opinion of the world, it is far more to be esteemed than riches. The more you know of it, the more you will love it.

It cannot be denied that to the eyes of the worldling, who deems happiness to consist in riches, rank, and power, the poor man is much to be pitied. But the judgments of the worldling are not to be followed; or, at any rate, if anything is to be learned from him, it is to love and esteem the very reverse of what he loves and esteems.

Jesus Christ had a very different estimate of poverty from the man of the world; when He came to earth He chose a life of poverty—of poverty so austere, as to appear to all but the eye of faith an eccentricity and a folly.

Behold how He, who as God was the great Creator of heaven and earth, and as man was a scion of the royal race of David, ordained that His earthly parents should be so reduced in circumstances as to be obliged to earn their bread in the sweat of their brow in the exercise of a humble trade; a trade in which He took so active a part as to be known by the name of the carpenter's Son. He was not born in a princely palace, and laid on the soft cushions of a gilded cradle; not even in His own lowly home did He first see the light of day, but in a wretched stable, where an ox and an ass were tethered. A few handfuls of straw to form His bed, a few coarse swaddling-clothes, scarce enough to shield His tender limbs from the cold night air, were all that was provided for the King of kings and Lord of lords. His first visitors were some poor shepherds, rough, ignorant men, whose lives were spent in the fields with their flocks.

And as His life was commenced, so it was carried on. It may truly be said that He was supported by alms; and who can say that He did not often lack bare necessaries; that, during the exile in Egypt, Mary was not frequently compelled to beg from strangers a piece of bread to still the hunger of the divine Child? On the return of the Holy Family to Nazareth, what a life of poverty and toil was His! Who, seeing Him as a hard-working and poorly clad carpenter, could have recognized in Him the Son of God, He who gives their meat to all things living?

And when, at the age of thirty years, He entered upon His public ministry in Galilee and Judea, He subsisted on the charity of others—a few loaves, a few small fishes, provided by the labors of the fishermen who were His disciples. Nor had He any home of His own wherein to take rest. "The foxes have holes"—such were His words—"and the birds of the air, nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." And when He ended His life upon the cross, His very garments were stripped off Him and divided among His executioners.

Our Lord's teaching in regard to poverty was fully in keeping with the example His life afforded. To the young man who wished to follow Him, He said: "Go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." When He sent out the apostles to preach His word, among other things He enjoined upon them to continue the same life of poverty they had learned of Him, not carrying with them so much as a staff for their journey. And to those who asked what reward they might expect for this, He answered: "Amen, I say to you, that you who have followed Me . . . you also shall sit upon twelve seats judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

The Blessed Virgin affords no less striking an example of poverty than her divine Son. In the *Magnificat* she

says that on account of her poverty the Lord bestowed on her His gifts, while the rich were sent empty away. Poor herself, she was espoused to a poor artisan, and at her purification she offered a pair of turtle-doves, the oblation prescribed for the poor.

The Fathers of the Church invariably speak of poverty in terms of highest eulogium. "We can mount up from earth to God," says St. Gregory, "if we desire nothing here below." St. Jerome bids those rejoice who possess little or nothing, because the burden they carry is a light one; and those who are stripped of all things, because they can follow Christ in His destitution. Other saints assert it to be the virtue which unites us most closely to God, the pearl of great price, the hidden treasure to acquire which a man will part with all else. And in their lives they preached yet more eloquently, for they carried this virtue almost to an excess. St. Francis of Assisi called it his spouse, his mistress, his queen, declaring himself to be more enamoured of poverty than the miser of his riches. The son of wealthy parents, at the age of twenty-five he denuded himself of everything, and, clad in a coarse habit, begged his bread from door to door. St. Elizabeth of Hungary offers a no less illustrious example, since, when driven forth from her castle a wanderer and an outcast, she asked that a *Te Deum* might be sung in thanksgiving to Our Lord for thus permitting her to walk in His footsteps.

If our blessed Lord, if all the saints and servants of God, thus loved and lauded and practised poverty, we cannot fail to be convinced of the beauty of this virtue, of its value as a means of attaining perfection. In fact, although riches are not in themselves evil, although they are not incompatible with a high degree of virtue, yet, in consequence of the corruption of human nature, those who live in the lap of luxury are more tempted than others to neglect what is good and do what is evil. Not

that the rich man as such is necessarily a reprobate; far from it. There is no one for whom salvation is impossible, whatever his state or condition of life, from the king in his palace to the mendicant on the door-step; from the high-born lady to the humblest maid-servant. The pages of hagiology furnish instances in all times of persons in opulent circumstances who never swerved from the law of God, who held aloof from the world and sanctified themselves amid the countless perils to which the possession of wealth exposed them. Yet, as I have said, riches have an unfortunate tendency to hold the human heart captive, to give it a distaste for the things of God, a disinclination for the practices of religion, and to draw it in the direction of evil.

Observe how many of the rich do not scruple to neglect the commandments of God and of the Church. Worldly interests, love of money, render them oblivious of their most sacred duties. No wonder, then, that Our Lord expresses Himself so severely in regard to the rich: "Amen, I say to you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven." And again: "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven." And He winds up with the terrible denunciation: "*Væ divitibus.*" "Woe to you that are rich."

This being so, have we not every right to assert poverty to be a virtue of great price, a sure and easy road to the kingdom of heaven? You, my children, will no longer look upon it as something to be dreaded, you will no longer envy those who have this world's wealth; for to do so would be to make a fatal mistake, that of regarding as a calamity what is in reality a grace and a blessing from the hand of God. And forasmuch as poverty may be a help to you in doing good and avoiding evil, in serving God faithfully and earning Paradise, leave to others the eager pursuit of transitory and perishable possessions,

leave to them the blind enjoyment of the riches that are theirs, and fix your whole hopes and aspirations on the attainment of those heavenly treasures which are far more precious and desirable than all that earth can offer.

And if you feel the pinch of poverty, think how many an unhappy mother cannot get bread to feed her hungry children, how many a young person has to toil from morn till eve in order to secure a bare subsistence. Think how Christ upon the cross had not a drop of water given Him to quench His thirst, and rejoice that you are able to imitate Him in the privations He endured. Think how short life is, how fleeting is time; would it not be the height of folly to choose the brief happiness riches might bring at the risk of forfeiting eternal felicity? Remember, that while God promises to give comfort to the mourner, possession of the land to the meek, mercy to the merciful, He does not merely promise the kingdom of heaven to the poor, He says that it is already theirs: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

SERMON XIX.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND PURITY.

THE fairest flower that can adorn the soul of a Child of Mary is the virtue of purity. It is a flower that exhales the fragrance of Paradise, and is to her what its lustre is to the jewel, its whiteness to the lily.

Purity is a virtue which embellishes and crowns all others, which alone deserves to be called angelic, because it imparts to the soul that possesses it the character of the angels, casting around her a halo of light and rendering her an object of special predilection in God's sight. To her He says, in the mystical language of love: "How beautiful art thou, my love! Thy eyes are dove's eyes, thy cheeks are like the pomegranate, thy lips as the honeycomb. Honey and milk are under thy tongue, thy voice is sweet, and the smell of thy garments as the smell of frankincense. Pure as the lily among thorns, white as the snow in Lebanon; arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come."

To-day we will consider the great value and the advantages of purity; and may Mary Immaculate, under whose special patronage you stand, make my words potent to inspire you with the love of this fairest, this holiest of virtues.

Purity was ever esteemed and honored by the more refined and cultivated minds among the nations of antiquity. Even in pagan Rome, corrupt and licentious to its very core, respect was paid to the vestal virgins, who had vowed to preserve their chastity; and now, when nine-

teen centuries have come and gone, purity is the most beauteous flower in the Church's garden, the faith of the Christian confirming what was said of old by the son of Sirach, that there is nothing so precious that it can compare with the chaste soul—nothing in heaven or earth, neither sun nor moon, neither gold nor finest jewels, that can rival it in beauty: "No price is worthy of a continent soul."

But in order to form a just idea of the excellence of chastity, we must look to Jesus Christ, who brought this virtue down to earth, and ennobled it infinitely by His example. He was not content to take His human nature from a virgin, pure and immaculate from her first conception. He desired that she should retain Her virginity inviolate, and for this end He wrought one of the most stupendous of miracles, consecrating her virginity in a new and wondrous manner by her divine maternity. For the purpose of concealing this lofty mystery, the chaste and holy Joseph was chosen to be the head of the Holy Family, the guardian of the Mother of God, the protector of the divine Child, the mortal to whom were confided the counsels of the Most High. And since the Son of God needed a precursor who should announce Him to the world as the expected Messias, the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world, the Baptist was selected for the office. He was a type of perfect chastity, sanctified in his mother's womb, and on account of his stainless life designated by Christ as the greatest of the sons of man. But the chief example of this virtue is the divine Redeemer Himself, the source and essence of purity: *Jesus puritas virginum*, the vine whose fruit are virgins. He permitted Satan to tempt Him to the sin of pride, of ambition, of idolatry, but not of impurity. He permitted the scribes and Pharisees to traduce Him as a Sabbath-breaker, a blasphemer, a hypocrite, sacrilegious, but as unchaste, never.

His special esteem for this virtue was manifested in the predilection He ever displayed for chaste souls. He loved all the apostles with the affection of a father for his family, but John was admitted to the most intimate friendship of His sacred heart. That apostle alone was privileged to lean his head upon the Saviour's breast; he alone could venture, when Peter dared not speak, to ask for an explanation of certain mysteries which passed their comprehension; he alone was intrusted with the care of the Blessed Virgin, and chosen to succeed Our Lord in the quality of her son. Why was this favored disciple distinguished by these marks of confidence and love? The Church tells us in the office for his day: "Jesus loved John; the chastity of this apostle entitled him to be loved more than all the others; a virgin when called to the apostolate, a virgin he remained throughout his life."

Moreover, whereas Our Lord calls those who do His Father's will by the fond names of mother, sister, and brother, He reserves for the chaste soul the appellation of spouse. Holy Scripture represents the celestial Bridegroom, when He visits His garden, the Church, as giving the preference among all the fair flowers to the lily, the symbol of purity. And on the description given in the Apocalypse of the heavenly Jerusalem, it is the prerogative of these virgin souls to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth; they are designated as the first-fruits of God and of the Lamb; the souls most valued, most beloved by the Lord Almighty. In the annals of the saints, also, we find that those upon whom Our Lord bestowed signal proofs of love and favor were the ones who cherished above all the virtue of chastity, and preserved it inviolate at any cost.

But if we would appreciate the excellence of purity, we have only to look at the Blessed Lady, the Queen of virgins, who stands unrivalled among all created beings

for the spotless purity that distinguished her. She was, in fact, the first instance ever known of one who voluntarily consecrated herself to God by the vow of virginity. She was the first, as St. Ambrose says, to raise the standard of chastity, beneath which in subsequent ages countless multitudes have enrolled themselves. We know that when the Archangel Gabriel came to announce to her the mystery of the Incarnation she was troubled at his salutation, fearing lest becoming the Mother of God might cost her the sacrifice of this angelic virtue. Only when she heard that the supreme dignity offered her would not involve the loss of her virginal purity, but rather enhance its brilliancy, did she pronounce the word of consent: *fiat*. Well, indeed, does she merit the title the Church gives her—Queen of virgins.

No wonder, then, that the saints, deeply impressed with the value, the beauty, of chastity, spoke of it in terms of highest praise. St. Ambrose declares that it transforms men into angels. St. Bernard goes further: he says that it raises men above angels, stating that if the angels are more to be envied, the chaste among the children of men are more to be admired, since the purity of the former is a property of their nature; while in the latter it is the result of virtue, of watchfulness, of mortification. And St. Basil exclaims: "O purity, how admirable thou art! Thou dost render man like to God, whose very essence is purity." And in order to preserve this treasure intact, thousands and thousands of men and women have turned away from the smiling prospect of a brilliant future and gone to bury themselves in the oblivion of the cloister, or the solitudes of the desert.

But the excellence of purity will stand out more strikingly if we consider the advantages redounding from its possession.

In the first place, it is a means of sanctification. St. Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, says: "This is the will

of God, your sanctification," and to show what constitutes this sanctity, he adds that it consists in abstaining from the passion of lust and all unclean desires. And in the Epistle to the Hebrews, he says: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see God," and explains this holiness to mean the total avoidance of all that is impure. Thus, according to this apostle, holiness and purity are the same thing, and he repeats this truth when he exhorts maidens to preserve their chastity intact, adding that thus they will be holy in body and in spirit. And the reason of this is, because the more the soul shuns all that is impure, the more readily will the heart be raised in untroubled peace towards God; and soaring above human miseries it will be closely united to Our Lord, who communicates Himself with special delight to the chaste soul.

Not only does purity sanctify the soul, it also renders it happy on earth and blessed in heaven. This world is, in very truth, a valley of tears, and for most of us it has more sorrows than joys, more crosses than consolations. Yet if there is one athwart whose path falls a ray of peace and of tranquil happiness, it is she whose heart is pure. God is the source of true joy, and He, the lover of chaste souls, vouchsafes to pour out upon them His choicest consolations. Ask those saints who have led on earth the life of angels, how it was that amid so many trials and sufferings they were ever cheerful and joyous; they will answer that they could not have believed such sweetness was the portion of the clean of heart. What, in fact, can disturb the peace of the chaste soul? She has subjugated her most unruly passions, she has triumphed over her most powerful enemy, she no longer fears him who goeth about as a roaring lion seeking to devour souls. She will have troubles, she will have crosses, for this life is a time of trial, of struggle, of warfare, but amid all these tribulations she will enjoy

a peace which all the gold of this world cannot purchase.

And this peace, this happiness, will be hers in death as it was in life. In that last terrible hour what a source of consolation, of joy will it be to the soul to look back upon a life of constancy in virtue, of victories over her rebel nature! If from her earliest years she has resisted the seductions of the world, conquered the concupiscence of the flesh, preserved herself by mortification from the contaminations of earth, led a life of chastity in the state to which she was called, the devil, though he will not leave her in peace, will, for all his efforts, have no power to harm her.

Happy, indeed, are chaste souls! Here, below, they are nearest to the immaculate heart of Jesus, "who feedeth among the lilies;" hereafter, it will be their prerogative to stand around the Lamb, "to follow Him whithersoever He goeth."

In conclusion, let me admonish you, Children of Mary, to love this virtue of purity, which makes a frail mortal into a glorious angel. Beware lest the poisonous breath of the demon mar the whiteness of your lily; guard it with the utmost care from the hand of the spoiler. Keep your mind free from every impure thought, your lips from every unseemly word, your heart from every evil affection, your body from every act which might grieve your guardian angel. Remember, that whatever other virtues you may possess, whatever rare gifts of nature may be yours, the slightest touch of impurity will disfigure your soul as much as a foul ulcer would a lovely countenance. Remember that purity is the fairest ornament of youth, the noblest mark of a Child of Mary, the surest pledge of predestination. Remember that nothing is more precious in the sight of the God of holiness and of the Queen of virgins than one who in the springtime of her life, in the first fervor of her youth, captivated by

the charm of this angelical virtue, generously contemns the allurements of the world, the flesh, and the devil, to embrace the life of an angel on earth, in order, one day, with the angels, to enjoy the reward granted to purity, the queen of all virtues.

SERMON XX.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND THE MEANS OF PRESERVING PURITY.

In the last conference I spoke of the excellence of purity, and the privileges enjoyed by those who possess it. But I must warn you that this virtue is as tender and fragile as it is beautiful and rich in merit. It is one of those delicate flowers that quiver in the slightest breeze, that droop and fade if they are handled roughly. Like the sensitive plant, it shrinks from the most loving touch; its safety depends on the respect shown to it; its spotless petals need no other nourishment than pure air, bright sunshine, and the dew that distils on them from above.

To-day, I intend to suggest to you the best means of preserving the measure of purity within your heart, and you will doubtless feel a strong desire to put them in practice.

All spiritual writers agree in asserting, and the experience of each one of us confirms the truth of the assertion, that the senses are the chief and most formidable enemies of chastity. Holy Scripture compares them to the doors of the soul, whereby death enters in; because through the senses come corrupt desires, impure thoughts, and carnal affections, which awaken and inflame the passions to the great peril of chastity. If, then, the senses are foes so much to be dreaded, the best means of safeguarding chastity is the custody and mortification of the senses.

First and foremost are the eyes. What a great blessing sight is to us! There is no greater misfortune than

to be blind. But if the sense of sight, which we prize so highly, is not kept in strict custody, if too much liberty is granted to it, there is nothing so bad, nothing so dangerous. Alas, for how many men and women an unguarded glance, a look of curiosity at something suggestive of evil, has led to a sad and shameful fall! How many a hapless maiden, through allowing too much liberty to her eyes, has drunk in the poison of impurity and lost her innocence! Her eyes have rested by chance, perhaps, upon some object, some person too seductive to the senses, and instead of instantly averting her gaze she has allowed her imagination to be defiled, her mind contaminated, her heart corrupted, her purity destroyed. Nothing is more fatal to this angelic virtue than the license of the eyes. Be warned, therefore, my children, and observe the strictest watchfulness in this respect. Restrain that natural curiosity which makes you desire to see everything, whether good or evil, for in the present day you will have the wish of seeing much which it would be better not to see. And if it cost you an effort to follow this advice, nay, even a heroic struggle and a real sacrifice, remember no virtue is acquired or preserved without effort, and, least of all, one so delicate and sensitive as purity.

And if the eyes may be called the windows of the soul, the ears equally deserve the name, for through them what is dangerous may easily find entrance. Hence it is necessary to mortify the sense of hearing also, to refuse to listen to unseemly and indecorous conversation, for thereby the mind may become filled with unchaste ideas, that have a tendency to awaken within the heart unruly affections and arouse evil consequences in the soul. By these the will is dragged down, and led to take pleasure in things base and shameful, utterly unworthy of a Christian. Beware, then, how you listen to a word, a jest, a mere expression at which exception could be taken; as

the apostle says: "Be not seduced, evil communications corrupt good manners." Believe me, the ruin of many a girl who has gradually become careless and worldly, who has lost her modesty and finally her virtue, has been owing to her taking part in conversation that outraged propriety. At first her better feelings revolted against it, then it ceased to offend her, presently she began to find amusement in being enlightened on subjects about which, till then, she had happily been ignorant. Thus passions that lie dormant are awakened, and a fire kindled which ends in the destruction of the soul.

Beware, also, how you lend your ear to anything that may be said against religion, the sacraments, our Holy Father the Pope, religious practices and those who are careful in observing them, for thereby doubts may be engendered in your mind—temptations regarding the faith—and you may be led to abandon the devout life, the surest guardian of purity. And if it be impossible for you to avoid remaining in the company of one who gives such license to his tongue, do not on any account allow yourself to smile at what is said from motives of human respect or a foolish fear of being thought over-pious, for then you would appear to approve the speaker, and encourage him to go on. You should, on the contrary, gently, but fearlessly, express your disapprobation, and rebuke the speaker; and if prudence obliges you to keep silence, let your silence be eloquent, and show very plainly that the conversation is not at all what you like, in fact, that you disapprove it entirely.

The sense of taste must also be modified, and the appetite restrained. "I chastise my body," St. Paul says, "and bring it into subjection, lest, perhaps, when I have preached to others, I, myself, should become a castaway." If the body be treated too leniently, it will not become docile, but arrogant. Just as the brute beasts that serve us require food to sustain their strength and

the whip to keep them in subjection, so our bodies need bread to support life and at the same time the rod of mortification lest they grow insolent and rebel. What did not the saints do to preserve their chastity! How severe were their fasts, their mortifications, their penances! Remember, that if chastity is a fair and fragrant lily, it only grows and flourishes amid thorns. If you are desirous to conquer your carnal propensities, to lessen the force of temptation, to keep your purity unsullied, beware of over-indulgence in eating and drinking. Be sober, as St. Peter exhorts you, in all things.

Thus we see that the first means to be employed to preserve the virtue of purity is mortification of the senses; the second is prayer. Our Lord couples these two together, as the two weapons with which the Christian must arm himself in order triumphantly to resist the assaults of his spiritual foes. "This kind," He says, referring to the vice opposed to chastity, "this kind is not cast out, but by prayer and fasting." Holy Scripture also tells us that continence is a gift of God which He bestows only on those who ask Him for it. Be instant in prayer then, O Christian; for, as St. Chrysostom says, prayer is a strong breastplate, a cuirass of tempered steel which wards off the blows of the enemy; prayer, as St. Ambrose teaches, calls down to us the Son of God, at whose omnipotent word the storm of concupiscence is stilled and the calm of continency is restored within the soul. Who, indeed, without the help of God, could sustain the continual struggle with the world, the flesh, and the devil waging war against our virtue!

And to fervent, persevering prayer, unite the frequent reception of the Holy Eucharist. Nothing is more potent, more efficacious in promoting purity of heart than holy communion, the corn of the elect, the wine whose fruit are virgins. In it we receive the sinless and stainless body of Christ, we approach the sacred tabernacle where purity

and holiness abide; those who partake of this celestial food will despise all carnal seductions and in a corrupt world will preserve their purity inviolate. Nor must I omit to exhort and admonish you more especially who are Children of Mary to have recourse to our immaculate Mother in time of temptation. Can it be supposed that she, who so greatly prized chastity as, first of all the daughters of Eve, to consecrate her virginity to God; she, who loves chaste souls and guards them as the apple of her eye, will not respond to the prayers of those who look to her for help to imitate her purity? Fly without fear to our blessed Lady, shelter yourselves beneath her mantle when danger menaces you, doubt not that she will defend you, if necessary, by means of a miracle. Of this I will give you an instance.

During the war that was carried on in the beginning of the present century between France and the Allied Powers, the inhabitants of the Alpine districts were forced to leave their homes to escape the violence of the brutal soldiery. One man, more savage than his comrades, had the cruelty to kill a father who stood forward to defend his daughter from outrage. The girl, shocked at the fate of her unhappy parent, fled in terror to the mountains, hotly pursued by a party of soldiers. On reaching the crest of the mountain, finding they had almost come up with her, and seeing no possibility of eluding capture, the heroic maiden glanced down at the precipice yawning at her feet, and exclaiming: "Mother of mercy, Immaculate Virgin, save me!" cast herself headlong from the height. The soldiers on arriving at the spot, in expectation of seeing the crushed and mangled body of the damsel at the base of the rocks, beheld her alive and unhurt, giving thanks on her knees for the timely succor afforded her by the Queen of angels. Touched with contrition, they too knelt and asked pardon of Heaven, and on their return to the camp, related to

their comrades the miraculous occurrence they had witnessed.

The young woman who had been the object of this marvellous interposition of Providence sought protection in the French camp; when her story became known, a shrine was erected in honor of the Queen of angels to mark the spot where she fell. Deeming herself under an obligation to dedicate to God the life He had thus miraculously preserved, she sold all she possessed, and with the proceeds caused a small hermitage to be built, where until her death in 1829, she spent her days in prayer and good works, subsisting on the alms of the faithful who visited the shrine.

Besides the practice of mortification and prayer, a Christian maiden who is jealous of her purity ought, as far as possible, to avoid familiar intercourse with the world, which in the present day is the enemy of all that is good. The world is the enemy of God, whose laws it openly violates; it is the enemy of humility, purity, all the virtues of which Our Lord gave us so sublime an example; it is the enemy of chaste souls, whom it seeks to ensnare and lead to perdition. Hence Holy Scripture forbids us to mingle with the world, and to love the things of the world, for the lusts and concupiscences of the world are carnal and corrupt.

These are, then, the most necessary and efficacious means for preserving a virtue which renders you beloved of God and of Mary the Mother of fair love, the Virgin Immaculate; may you make practical and diligent use of them, esteeming chastity as the most precious of treasures, one which must be watched over with scrupulous and unceasing vigilance. Mortify your senses, be fervent in prayer, shun the dangers the world offers, and make use of every means that will aid you to keep your purity unstained, even though this may cost you many and bitter sacrifices. Persevere bravely in the name of God, under

the protection of Mary, for a Christian maiden who is destitute of this virtue, whatever other advantages she may possess, is like a plant without blossoms, a sun that gives no light.

SERMON XXI.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND MEEKNESS.

Of all the Christian virtues there is one which may be said to regulate the others and to enhance their beauty and to render those who lead a virtuous life pleasing and lovable; this is Christian meekness. The Wise Man tells us that by mild words we increase the number of our friends and break the wrath of enemies; moreover, where this virtue is absent every other is in more or less danger; for instance, fraternal charity may degenerate into sharp censure of others, humility may acquire a certain hardness which repels instead of attracting, zeal may take the form of impetuosity and pernicious activity. But let these virtues be wedded to meekness, and chastity will be what the Apostle describes it, patient, kind, forbearing; humility will wear a sweet and amiable aspect; zeal will become moderate and calm in its impulses. For this reason St. Basil declares meekness to be the greatest of all virtues: "*Maxima omnium virtutum mansuetudo.*" And St. Francis of Sales calls it "the virtue of virtues."

To-day, therefore, I intend to speak on the subject of meekness, in the hope of inducing you to cultivate this virtue, so that you may be entitled to participate in the privileges promised by Jesus Christ to the meek, when He said: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land." The land, that is, of their own hearts, the hearts of their fellow-men, and the heart of God Himself.

Meekness is a virtue which renders us gentle in manner and calm in action; so that we are not only kind and

forbearing with persons whom we love, for this is merely natural and there is no merit in it, but also with those who are ill-tempered and difficult to please, as well as under vexatious circumstances, or when trifles occur, as they so often do, to annoy or wound our self-love. It teaches us to suppress the biting sarcasm that arises to our lips, to repress the contemptuous smile that might give offence; to bear not only the trials that come directly from God, for this patience requires of us, but also those which our fellow-creatures bring on us, whether at home or abroad; in a word, meekness consists in conquering our nature so completely as to render good for evil, to return a soft answer to an angry speech, a kind deed for an injury, in imitation of Him who said: "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart."

There can be no doubt that it is the duty of the Christian to acquire all the virtues, since the name of Christian implies that he is a follower of Christ, who is virtue personified. And among all the virtues essential to the disciple of Our Lord, meekness holds the foremost place. "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart" is the precept He enjoins on us. The Fathers of the Church, commenting on these words, say that our divine Master, in proposing Himself as the pattern of meekness, might be said to attach comparatively little value to the other virtues, important and necessary as they undeniably are, so much does this one preponderate, in His esteem, over the rest.

The prophet Isaias foresaw that meekness would be the virtue most prized by the Redeemer, and in describing Him who was to come he found no figure more suitable than that of a lamb dumb before his shearers, which allows itself to be despoiled of its fleecy coat without uttering even the least complaint. The Baptist did the same when, sent to announce the advent of the Messias, he pointed Him out to the people as the Lamb of God,

singling out His meekness as His distinguishing characteristic. And how numerous were the examples of this virtue that Our Lord gave during His life, both hidden and public; with what meekness of heart He remained for a long course of years subject to Mary and Joseph at Nazareth, and that not only during His childhood, but after He had attained to man's estate. In the period of His public ministry, while journeying from town to town, from village to village, He uniformly displayed the same amiability, gentleness, and meekness. On one occasion, when the Samaritans refused Him hospitality, the disciples, indignant at this discourtesy, asked permission to call down fire from heaven on these ungrateful people. But Jesus rebuked them, saying: "You know not of what spirit you are." At another time He was sitting at table in the house of a Pharisee, when a woman who was a sinner prostrated herself at His feet, bathing them with her tears. The Pharisee was astonished that Our Lord did not drive her away; but He, turning in the kindest, tenderest manner to the unhappy woman, said to her: "Daughter, thy sins are forgiven thee." What a contrast this affords to the conduct of the scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites and evildoers that they were! And in the Garden of Olives, when the traitor Judas betrayed Him with a kiss, Jesus did not manifest the slightest anger, and even called him by the fond name of friend. When the soldiers laid hold of Him, to bind Him as a malefactor, instead of annihilating them by His divine power, He meekly gave Himself into their hands; the only miracle He wrought on that occasion being one of mercy, in healing the servant whose ear Peter had cut off. On Calvary, when covered with wounds, mocked and blasphemed by those who stood by, He prayed for His tormentors, excusing their shameful deed. And in sending out the apostles to evangelize the world, He exhorted them to be as lambs among wolves.

Thus from the crib to the cross, Christ's whole life was one constant exercise of meekness and benignity.

Seeing, then, that the Christian is bound to form himself more and more closely upon the sublime pattern presented to him, ought we not, contemplating the meekness of Jesus, this most gentle Lamb, to banish from our hearts all feelings of bitterness, of resentment, of anger? Anger is in itself an evil thing; it is the most unruly and turbulent of the passions; for, as the Wise Man says: "He that is easily stirred up to wrath shall be more prone to sin." And the Apostle couples it with malice, when he says: "Let all bitterness, and anger, and indignation, and clamor be put away from you, with all malice." It is a vice that debases and degrades the soul of the Christian; St. Jerome compares it to a gate, which if it be closed, the virtues are at peace; but if it be open, there is no sin which may not invade the soul.

Yet it cannot be denied that if there is one virtue little thought about in general, it is this very one. How many, even of you, Children of Mary, go to the sacraments, hear sermons, and still cannot take an affront quietly, cannot tolerate a rebuke, even though it be deserved, cannot bear with the peculiarities of those about you. How many of you are industrious, modest, unworldly, and yet for some trifling cause you answer abruptly, you show temper, you grow angry, and give scandal perhaps when with a little meekness of manner, gentleness of speech, you might give edification and set a good example. Be gentle and unassuming towards your superiors, obeying them promptly and cheerfully; towards your companions, observing charity and concord; towards your inferiors, speaking kindly to them and doing them all the good you can; do this and you will prove yourself the children of God, faithful followers of your divine Master, of whom the prophet said of old: "Tell ye, the daughter of Sion, behold thy King cometh unto thee; He is meek."

Here some will perhaps answer: "This is all very well, and meekness is undoubtedly a most desirable virtue; but you cannot imagine how irascible I am by nature, how quickly aroused to anger. Besides, how can I help feeling enraged at provocations which would try the patience of a saint?"

This excuse is but a poor one. Who does not know that St. Francis of Sales was naturally very hot-tempered, and prone to outbursts of anger. Yet, by dint of unceasing efforts, he succeeded in dominating his passions so completely that his composure was never ruffled, and the gentleness of his demeanor, the quiet tone of his voice, exercised a fascination over all who approached him. He is stated to have converted more souls to God by his meekness than all the great preachers of the world by their eloquence; never was there a more faithful image of the Saviour's meekness than this illustrious saint presented. On one occasion, when he had been exposed to great provocation, he was asked how he had continued to keep calm: "I have made a covenant with my tongue," he replied, "never to utter a word when my heart is in the greatest agitation."

St. Vincent de Paul was likewise of a quick and irascible temperament, but he succeeded in mastering himself so well that neither his countenance or manner ever betrayed a trace of anger. If at any time he thought a hasty word had escaped his lips, he set himself a severe penance, accused himself openly of his fault, humbly asked pardon of the person he had offended, and redoubled his prayers and his watchfulness. Imitate these examples, my dear children, and you will find the task of curbing your temper, a difficult one perhaps, but not an impossible one; and you will see that if you are wanting in meekness, this is your own fault, not that of your natural disposition. And if provocations abound, remember that there is no true and solid virtue which has not been

tried; for it is amid difficulties and oppositions that virtue is proved and perfected. What merit is there in being meek when no one thwarts you and all proceeds in accordance with your wishes? But to preserve your equanimity when exposed to rudeness and discourtesy, to repay an insult with kindness, to return a gentle answer to an angry speech, to restrain the ebullition of annoyance which seeks vent in words, this is the virtue whereby we please God, we keep at peace with our neighbor, we become like Jesus Christ and merit the blessing of Heaven.

It must not, however, be supposed that all anger and indignation is incompatible with meekness. It is not wrong to feel angry at dishonor done to God, at scandals on hearing religious practices decried, and the ministers of God defamed; it is not wrong to denounce those who seek to ruin souls. Meekness does not require of us that we should not wage war with vice, and oppose what is evil. Our divine Master, burning with zeal for the glory of His heavenly Father, despite His angelic meekness, on seeing the desecration of the Temple of Jerusalem, filled with indignation, took a scourge of little cords and forcibly expelled from the sacred edifice those who bought and sold therein.

Conform your conduct to these rules and you need not fear. Although you are naturally quick-tempered, though your provocations are many, yet, fortified by God's grace, you will acquire that spirit of meekness which will endear you to all, and above all to the God who said: "Blessed are the meek of heart."

SERMON XXII.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND FRATERNAL CHARITY.

When St. John the Evangelist, the beloved apostle, was no longer able, on account of the infirmities of age, to repair on foot to the assemblies of the faithful, he was carried thither by his disciples. And there, surrounded by those whom he loved, he invariably began his discourses with these words: "Little children, love one another." His hearers, growing somewhat weary of the repetition of the same precept, said to him: "Master, why dost thou always exhort us to love one another? Canst thou not speak on any other subject?" "My children," the holy old man answered, "would that you knew how exceeding great this precept of fraternal charity is; it embraces all the others! Love one another in the spirit of mutual charity, and you will be true Christians, you will be perfect, you will be saints."

The fact that the Apostle of Charity, he who, leaning his head on the Saviour's breast at the Last Supper, had drunk from the very source and fountain of divine love, constantly exhorted his disciples to love one another argues the immense importance attaching to this command. And yet of all the laws of God, scarce one is so frequently transgressed as this. Let me, therefore, say a few words to you about fraternal charity, a virtue which may be called the key to the heart of God and of man. And although I can say nothing which you have not already heard a hundred times before, I may yet be the means of recalling to your mind truths known long since but now, perchance, forgotten.

Fraternal charity is the love which we owe to our neighbor, inasmuch as he is God's creature, made by Him to His image and likeness. The incarnate God Himself proclaimed this duty of brotherly love, first of all by His own lips, afterwards by the mouth of His apostles; so that throughout the gospels, in all the epistles, it is constantly inculcated upon us.

When a certain lawyer asked Our Lord: "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus answered: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind." Satisfied with this reply, he was about to depart, when Jesus stopped him, saying: "The second commandment is like to this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." During His life on earth He constantly enjoined upon men this command; and at the Last Supper, when about to go forth to His passion, addressing the apostles, He said: "I give to you a new commandment, that as I have loved you, that you also love one another." He calls it, as the Fathers of the Church tell us, *His* commandment and a *new* commandment, to express His special desire that it should be faithfully kept by all men; to signify that among all virtues that of charity was the dearest to Him, the most precious in His sight. And as it is natural to repeat anything that we have much at heart, Our Lord says again: "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another." In these words He gives them to understand that the distinguishing mark of His followers will not be that of leading a chaste life, to be penitent, mortified despisers of this world's vanities; no, it will be their mutual love for one another. It is equivalent to saying that upon the observance or non-observance of this law depends our being numbered among His scholars and regarded as His disciples, or being counted as unbelievers, idolaters, those, in fact, who know not

God. No words could teach us more clearly, more forcibly, the value of this law of fraternal charity.

The apostles also, the depositaries of divine truth, proclaimed this precept to all nations. St. Peter says in his first epistle: "Before all, have a constant mutual charity among yourselves." St. Paul, speaking of the gifts he might possess, the sufferings he might endure for the sake of his brethren, adds that if he had not charity, all else would profit him nothing. And St. John was so deeply convinced of the importance of this virtue that in all his discourses, in all his epistles, he appears to aim at nothing else but impressing it on the hearts of all men; assuring them that he who loves God must of necessity love his neighbor also; that he who does not love his brother is not of God, but is a child of the devil. Hence we see that charity is the device and watchword of the Christian. We are not to love our neighbor on account of a certain sympathy between us, not for anything he is in himself; not for the benefits we have received, or hope to receive from him, but to love him for the love of God, because it is the command of God. Charity obliges us to love him, however uncongenial his character, however rough his manners, however evil his conduct; for he still bears the image of the God who created him. Nor does Our Lord content Himself with bidding us love our neighbor as ourself; lest we should possibly misinterpret the word neighbor He adds this solemn command: "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that persecute you;" thus enjoining on us, and as a duty, to love and do good to those who have offended us and injured us, however great may be the wrong done to us, and however impenitent the offender. Nor is our charity to be of a superficial nature, consisting of expressions of general benevolence, limited to sterile words. We are to love our neighbor really and sincerely, to be heartily desirous for his welfare, to

be ready to succor and aid him if need be; to love him from our heart, so as to be able, as the Apostle says, "to rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep."

We shall be better able to judge of our own conduct in regard to the fulfilment of this law, if we consider the principal ways in which it is violated.

We sin against charity chiefly by speaking evil of our neighbor, disclosing things which, although true, were unknown or forgotten, speaking his faults without sufficient cause, criticising and putting an evil construction on his actions. I will not speak of calumny, which imputes to others sins which they have not committed, for of this no Christian would be guilty. But how much evil is done, even by devout persons, by listening to and repeating reports prejudicial to their neighbor, by judging his conduct, detracting from his merits, qualifying the praise bestowed on him by others. All these are faults against charity, since they injure your neighbor's good name, which is more valuable to him than riches. Beware, therefore, how you utter an indiscreet word, how you hand on a whisper, however unimportant it may appear to you, remembering that you, as Children of Mary, are bound to greater caution and circumspection in all you say and do. Rather let the charity that unites you lead you to conceal the defects of others, and if they are maligned, boldly to speak up in their defence, by mentioning their virtues, or if they are really in fault, bringing forward anything that may be said to excuse them.

A second way whereby we sin against charity is by cherishing resentment, anger, or dislike. "Charity," says St. Paul, "is patient, is kind; charity envieth not, is not puffed up, is not provoked to anger, beareth all things, endureth all things." And you ought to bear, if occasion requires, with the defects and shortcomings of those with whom you live or are brought into contact, with

the charity which becomes one who aspires to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ. Be moderate in what you say, answer gently and courteously, give your reasons without acrimony, do not assume that haughty, cold manner which often wounds more than stinging words. Above all, despise no one, or it may come to pass that one day you will see the companion, the acquaintance, of whom you thought scorn on earth wear a brighter diadem than yours in Paradise.

Another way of offending against charity is by indulging in jokes at the expense of another, by ridicule and raillery. There certainly is no harm in a little mirth. God who made all things in nature so beautiful, does not forbid us to be merry at times, provided we keep within just limits. St. Philip Neri used to say he would have neither scruples nor melancholy in his house. A jest, a smart saying, which will amuse and enliven the company, is no offence against charity. But to allow one's self to ridicule any one persistently and freely, especially if he or she has any peculiarity or defect which occasions remark, is a cruel pastime. Think how much pain your sarcastic words, your ironical looks, will give to the unfortunate individual who is the butt of your witticisms; and instead of deriding those whose peculiarities expose them to be laughed at and mocked, be very careful not to hurt their feelings in any way. Remember, that for aught you know, they may be specially dear to God.

Finally, great want of charity is shown by neglecting, or not caring sufficiently, for the sick, especially if they are of your own household, or if they are poor and lonely. Our blessed Lady no sooner heard that her cousin Elizabeth was indisposed, than she quitted her home, left the retirement she loved, and set out on a long journey over rough roads in order to render her assistance. Do you do the same; whenever one of your relatives or friends or any poor woman falls sick, hasten to serve her in the

true spirit of charity. Visit her as often as you can, show her every kindness, bear with her, do not grow weary or show by your manner that you grudge the sacrifices you have to make. Charity to the sick is a vein of gold, which if worked with a good will, will enrich you immensely in God's sight.

Let this fair, this blessed virtue reign supreme in your heart. It will extinguish within you all that savors of self-love and egotism, and you will love one another with love unfeigned; it will be a sweet bond of union, and you will love one another with an active, practical charity, helping one another without consulting your own inclinations, your own tastes, your own interests; you will love one another with an unfailing, lifelong charity, which, becoming day by day more perfect, more sublime, will at last be akin to the charity of God Himself, in whom all our affections centre, on whom all our hopes rest.

SERMON XXIII.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND RECTITUDE OF INTENTION.

If we examine the pages of the Gospel we shall find Our Lord frequently urging upon us the necessity of good works. Now He exhorts us to trade with the talents we have received, and now to watch lest we be taken unprepared; again he speaks of a harvest to be gathered in, of a lord who requires an account from his steward; these figures and parables are intended to stimulate us to labor, to incite us to accumulate a store of good works. It will be well for us if we heed these exhortations, for heaven is the recompense promised to the diligent who serve God with fidelity; it is the reward of merit, the crown given to those who fight valiantly and overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil.

It is not, however, enough to perform good works, nor even to abound in good works; all our works must be done with a pure intention of pleasing God. This truth, all-important as it is, is too often overlooked. Inasmuch as our works have no value in themselves, they derive all their worth from the interior motive that actuates them; thus Our Lord says: "If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome; but if thy eye be evil, thy whole body shall be darksome." The eye which, according as it is single or evil, makes all our works lightsome or darksome, is the good or evil intention wherewith they are performed. If the intention be good and pure, the deed will be good and meritorious; whereas, if the intention be evil, it will vitiate the act, not only depriving it of merit, but rendering it displeasing to God.

This is the truth that I propose in our conference today to impress most forcibly on your minds, in order that henceforth all your exterior actions may be profitable for your interior life.

Rectitude of intention consists in this: that whatever the act performed by the Christian, it must be done not only from no bad motive, or purely natural and human motive, but it must be done from a supernatural and holy motive, with the intention of fulfilling the will of God.

There are two reasons why we should act with this rectitude of intention: the glory of God, and our own good.

Nothing is more evident than that every creature ought, in all he does, to aim at pleasing and honoring God; this should be his guiding principle. God, as we know full well, is our Creator and our final end; to Him we owe every instant of our life, for He it is who gave us that life and preserves it to us, so that we are His property; we are, so to speak, like a field over which He has complete and absolute ownership. And as the produce of a field necessarily belongs to the proprietor of that field, so we are bound to bear fruit for God, to refer to Him our every thought, our every affection, our every word or deed, to keep Him continually before our eyes and in our heart. Moreover, how is it possible for the Christian to obey the commandment, the first and greatest of all the divine commandments, to love the Lord his God with his whole heart and his whole mind and his whole soul, if affections of the heart are not given to Him, and the powers of the mind dedicated to His service? How can he love God with the whole strength of his soul, if in one single action God has no part? Hence we see that rectitude of intention is necessary to enable us to obey the divine law.

Our divine Lord Himself sets us the example of re-

ferring all to God, for, on coming to earth, He shaped every action with this intention, as He said again and again. Thus when He taught His disciples how to pray, He desired them to address their petitions to His Father in heaven; when He worked miracles, before doing so He raised His eyes and prayed to His eternal Father, declaring that in all things He only sought to do the will of Him who had sent Him. Although, as equal to the Father, He had power to do all in His own name, He sought only the glory of His Father in His life, His death, His resurrection; at Bethlehem and in Egypt, during the years spent at Nazareth, amid the glories of Thabor and the ignominy of Calvary, this sublime intention was the actuating principle of His every word and deed.

Now if, as we have seen, rectitude of intention in all our actions is indispensable to the fulfilment of our duty towards God, to promote whose glory and honor ought to be our first object, how much more is it advantageous for ourselves, since without it our actions, however good in themselves, have no merit; while with it, on the contrary, even the least and most insignificant act will be worthy of an eternal reward. Rectitude of intention is to our works what the eye is to the body, the root to the tree, the sun to the world. Just as the whole body is in darkness if the eyesight be gone, as the tree withers and dies if the root be cast away, as the world would become a chaos if the light of the sun were withdrawn, so our works are lifeless and useless, unless animated by the pure intention of pleasing God. What action is more praiseworthy than to give an alms to the poor man who asks it of us for the love of God, to spend a night at the bedside of the sick, who tosses about in painful unrest? What more admirable than to arrest the downward course of some unhappy fellow-creature who is hastening headlong to perdition? Yet, if it be done with a

thought of attracting the praise of onlookers, or to gratify self-esteem, it is utterly worthless, and the commendation of the world will be its only recompense. The Pharisees, whose lives were outwardly most exemplary and devout, received a severe rebuke from Our Lord, because their works were done without a right intention, merely to obtain human applause. In the judgment of the world the deed is esteemed for what it is in itself, independently of the object it has in view; while in the sight of God, who looks at the heart and the will, it is the intention that makes the deed good or bad. If in what you do you secretly gratify self-love, indulge your own inclinations or passions, if you seek your own glory and not the glory of God, your days will be spent without profit to yourself; for, as St. Eusebius says, you can only be said to have lived on those days in which all your works were performed with the sole object of pleasing God.

Again, we lose much if, instead of directing our intention to God, we act from motives which, if not reprehensible, are at any rate purely human. How fair, how precious are the works we perform from a right intention! It matters not if they are small and insignificant, the God to whom we look in performing them rewards them so liberally that more is gained by a trifling alms—a cup of cold water—given for His sake than by the distribution of all one possesses to the poor without this pure intention. Even the most ordinary actions, such as taking our meals or our recreation, if done in view of pleasing God, who looks not at the magnitude of the gift but the love of the donor, may become golden coins wherewith to purchase Paradise. Even the hours of sleep may be turned to profit if when we lie down to rest we offer to God every pulsation of our heart, every breath we draw, that it may be to His honor and glory, nay more, our very desires and wishes may become fruit-

ful in merit, thanks to this doctrine of intention; for God, unlike man, rewards the good will that prompts the deed, even when our efforts, through no fault of our own, result in failure.

Well will it be for you, my children, if in your every action you look to God as the sole end of your being, just as the mariner fixes his eye on the polar star. By thus doing, you will make daily progress in virtue and in sanctity, and by unremitting though not arduous exertions, you will accumulate inestimable treasures for eternity. Do not imagine that anything very difficult is required of you; that at every step you take, every time you begin anything, and many times while you are doing it, you must with an express and definite act direct your intention to God. No; it is enough to refer all your works to God every morning. When once the Christian has elevated his soul to God, offering to Him all he does, whether he sleeps or eats, whether he amuses himself or pursues the business of his calling, in virtue of this pious intention, resolutely formed and adhered to, he will continually tend towards God, as the magnetic needle invariably points to the pole, turn it whatever way you will.

Nothing, indeed, is more simple than this which is demanded of you; there is no question of fasts, of austerities that exceed your strength, only of care, watchfulness, and recollection, a sacrifice, slight indeed, when compared with the vast benefits accruing from it. The benefit of rendering a multitude of actions meritorious, which otherwise would be profitless; the benefit of rendering the soul more active, more alive to the things of God, more strong in temptation; the benefit, in a word, of making great progress with little labor.

Wherefore, from this time forth, my dear children, never commence any course of action, even if it be good or indifferent, without first directing your intention to God;

remembering that rectitude of intention, like the stone that turned everything to gold that it touched, will make your works of value for eternity. Let your aim ever be to please God, your device that of St. Ignatius: "*All for the greater glory of God.*" When you wake in the morning, dedicate to Him the actions you will perform during that day, saying: "All for Thee, my God; nothing for myself, nothing for the world, the flesh, or the devil." Renew this intention now and again during the day, especially before commencing your principal actions; for just as a flame cannot rise up straight in a high wind, but it is driven hither and thither, so external interests—the occupations that follow one another in constant succession—divert the mind and distract the soul, and thus it may come to pass that what was begun for God, is ended for some human motive. How happy will you be, if at the close of your life, you find all your works inscribed by the hand of God in the Book of Life, as having been done in obedience to the will of Him, whom alone you desire to serve and to please.

SERMON XXIV.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND LITTLE ACTS OF VIRTUE.

WE read in Holy Scripture that "they that seek the Lord shall not be deprived of any good." These words which, it may almost be said, form the foundation of the structure of Christian perfection, recall to my mind a mistake only too common even among those who fear God—the mistake of imagining that, while the observance of the divine law and the precepts of the Church is binding upon all, it is otherwise with the performance of the little acts of virtue for which occasion so frequently presents itself; and that to make a point of practising these would be to take upon one's self a yoke which Our Lord does not lay upon His servants. Deluded by this erroneous idea, many neglect small acts of virtue because they consider them insignificant. Unable to perform great ones because no opportunity for doing so offers itself, they pass their days in a state which certainly is not pleasing to God, and at the hour of death find their hands empty and devoid of merit.

There may, perchance, be some among my hearers who act in this way; who despise small things as being of no importance. Let them question their conscience on this point; meanwhile, it may be well for me to say a few words about these acts, apparently small and of no consequence if viewed by the eye of man, but great and most precious if looked at under the light of Our Lord's teaching as we find it in the Gospel. He there tells us that He will reward the good servant for the very reason that he has been exact and faithful in small things.

Believe me, he who does not give small things the consideration they deserve displeases God, and deprives himself of many graces and merits.

First of all, let us have a clear understanding as to what these little acts of virtue are. They are victories, trifling ones it is true, but repeated and almost continual, which the soul gains over itself; acts, as we have said, of no account in the eyes of the world, but precious in God's sight, since He looks not at the work itself, but at the will that prompted it. For instance, to bear patiently the disagreeableness arising from the uncongenial character of the people with whom you live; to give up your own will readily to the will of another; to say nothing about the incivility shown you, the sharp words addressed to you by persons from whom such conduct should be least expected; to rise early and go to church when you would fain take a little longer rest; to break off some pleasant occupation at the call of another; to restrain a wandering imagination; to endeavor to keep your mind recollected in the midst of distractions, without losing patience or discontinuing your efforts; these and others like them, of which life is full, are acts of virtue, small, indeed, but really most meritorious, because they demand self-sacrifice and self-abnegation.

Moreover, the neglect of these little acts of virtue is displeasing to God. Consider for a moment, what God is, and what you are in regard to Him. He is the King of kings, the Lord of lords, who with His omnipotent voice called the universe out of nothing; who created you and keeps you in being; who watches over your interests and provides for your wants with a kindness more than paternal; who with His holy inspirations holds you back from evil, and inclines you to the love and practice of virtue; who, when your soul is weak and infirm, imparts to it by His grace, His sacraments, health and vigor to move with alacrity in the way of His command-

ments. You, on the other hand, are His creatures, His children, His servants, the recipients of His bounty; you have promised over and over again to serve Him with fidelity, to keep Him before you every day, every hour of your life, and to thirst for Him as the hart thirsts for the cooling spring. Would it not show profound ingratitude on your part, and arouse His just displeasure, if you should refuse to yield Him the service you owe to Him in small things as well as in great?

It is true that we are under no obligation to pay a visit to the church or to hear Mass on week-days; and that it is a very trifling thing to recite one's beads, to give an alms to a poor man, to keep silence when you long to speak, to take pains to give good advice to a friend. These acts are unimportant in comparison with what is matter of precept. But to disregard them proves that you care little about pleasing God; that you make a poor and grudging return for His favors; that you do not feel towards Him, your first and greatest benefactor, the gratitude one naturally feels for benefits received. Is not this enough, I ask again, to displease God? He has the right to require from you exact obedience and generous service, even in the least and most minute things.

Nor does the contempt shown for small acts of virtue do nothing except displease God, it also deprives us of His graces. We know that the more careful and zealous the soul is in His service, the more lavishly does He bestow on her His gifts and graces, while He is less liberal in granting them, and even withholds them altogether, from those who are slothful and unfaithful servants; this He tells us Himself in the parable of the talents. Hence we see that one who contents himself with keeping the commandments of God and of the Church, and manifests indifference for other good works because they appear slight and trivial, will meet with a very

small amount of favor from God. He who grows cold in the service of God will find God grow cold towards him; if he gives little and grudgingly, God will cease to watch over him and assist him in danger; the unemployed talent will be taken from him, and the words of Scripture will be fulfilled: "He that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little."

Indeed if you wish to know the reason why the spiritual condition of Christians varies so very much—why some souls advance rapidly in the way of virtue, while others walk with slow and lagging steps; why some delight in all they do for God, and are unwilling to omit any of their devotions, while others content themselves with the minimum, and even perform that reluctantly; why some accomplish all their religious exercises without omitting any of the duties of their state, while others cannot find time for them—you will find the explanation in Christ's words: "To every one that hath shall be given, and he shall abound; but from him that hath not, that also which he seemeth to have shall be taken away." If you would know the reason why so many Christians gradually become careless in the fulfilment of their duties, slothful in the practice of virtue, why religion becomes distasteful to them and they omit one thing after another, it is because they have neglected little acts of virtue, and this neglect has grown upon them until at last the works of obligation have become an irksome duty. Some trivial omission, some slight infidelity has been like the stone Daniel saw, which, detaching itself from the rock and rolling onward, increased in size until it became a mountain; or like a little piece of leaven that corrupts the whole lump. Believe me, my children, in matters which affect our eternal salvation there is nothing small in God's sight. Whatever His grace urges you to do, whether to the attainment of great virtues or to the cultivation of lesser ones, your duty is to correspond to grace, for to do

otherwise would be to peril your soul. Many a one has owed his salvation, his sanctification, to not having omitted the performance of some act of virtue which man contemns.

It is related of Sister Jane Mary Spinola, the daughter of rich and noble parents, that she was very anxious to know to which of all the matrimonial proposals made for her, her parents would give the preference. Hearing one day that a Spanish grandee was closeted with her father, to arrange her marriage to a personage of high position, her curiosity was so great that she crept softly to the door in the hope of overhearing the conversation, or at least learning the name of her suitor. Suddenly the thought came into her mind: "It would be a real act of virtue were I to mortify my curiosity and go away at once." Then came the answering thought: "I must wait and hear what concerns me so closely." And the interior voice spoke again: "Cannot you lay aside this anxiety for the love of your Lord? There is nothing that cannot be done for love of Him." "No," she said to herself; "it is quite right to be anxious to know who is to be my future husband." For a moment a struggle went on within her; she put her ear to the door, the next instant withdrew it, and hastening back to her room, closed the door behind her. A volume of St. Teresa's works happened to be on the table; she took it up and opened it at the place where the saint describes her vision of Our Lord scourged at the pillar. Touched by grace, she melted into tears; and while her father was negotiating a splendid alliance for his daughter, the young girl resolved to bid farewell to the world and enroll herself among the daughters of St. Teresa. In this capacity she attained so high a degree of sanctity that she has been declared venerable. Behold how great the reward merited by one small act of self-conquest.

Learn, my children, never to despise small things; a tiny leak may cause the loss of a gallant ship. The devil is

well aware of this; when he seeks to compass the ruin of a soul he rarely tempts her at once to commit some grave sin from which she would revolt, he only suggests the beginning of evil, some slight omission in regard to her religious practices; for he hopes that if he can but introduce the thin edge of the wedge all will be gained, and the soul, unless upheld by grace, will fall from bad to worse.

Finally, the neglect of small acts of virtue deprives us of a great amount of merit. Without merit we cannot hope to enter heaven; what folly, therefore, if we despise the occasion of accumulating treasures for eternity because they are apparently insignificant! Remember, that grains of sand make a mountain, drops of water form the ocean, and thus day by day we can, by improving our opportunities, add to our store. Small acts of virtue are the stones wherewith the edifice of our sanctity is built; a single stone is no great thing in itself, yet it is necessary for the completion of the structure you are endeavoring to raise. Resolve, therefore, to make use of every occasion that presents itself, however trivial, however unimportant it may seem, for the profit of your soul. You will, perhaps, as is generally the case in every enterprise, experience difficulties at the outset, but these will soon vanish, for the soul soon habituates herself to the practice of virtue. Thus by holy perseverance you will, with little labor, amass great merits for heaven; and having sown much, you will in the day of harvest also reap much.

SERMON XXV.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND SANCTITY.

It is the will of God that we should all strive after holiness. "Be ye holy," He says Himself, "because I am holy." And speaking by the mouth of St. Paul, He says: "This is the will of God, your sanctification." And in the early ages of the Church, when Christians had to contend, not only with the evil proclivities of their own heart, the allurements of the world, the ordinary perils of their state in life, but with persecution, tortures, and death itself, men and women vied with each other in their zeal in climbing the heights of sanctity. Tertullian says that in his time the name of Christian was equivalent to that of saint; and St. Paul, in his epistles, employs the two words interchangeably. At a later period also, when Christianity became the dominant religion, kings and queens, warriors, monks, virgins, and recluses, each in their several ways, consecrated their lives to God for the attainment of sanctity, convinced that the title of Christian pledged them to follow the example and the teaching of Christ, the model of perfect holiness.

Now, alas! all is changed. The devil, who neglects no means of inducing souls to forsake what is good and of leading them to perdition, has, among other erroneous notions, disseminated the idea that sanctity is incompatible with the exigencies of modern life; that the obstacles to its acquisition are insuperable; that human frailty is so great as to render it impossible to accomplish successfully the work of one's own sanctification. It will be my endeavor to-day to dissipate this fatal error;

to show you that the attainment of sanctity is by no means beyond our power.

First of all let me assure you, my dear children, that God, in calling you to holiness, does not require you to embrace a life of seclusion and solitude, to withdraw entirely from society, and deny yourself the enjoyment of innocent pleasures and possessions ; to practise the severest bodily austerities, and give yourself entirely to prayer, meditation, and other religious exercises. No, God does not demand of you long prayers, protracted vigils, extraordinary mortifications and penances. The sanctity He demands of you consists in never allowing your faith to fail, however rough the path by which He leads you, however terrible the trials He lays on you ; it consists in performing all the duties of your state as perfectly as possible to please Him ; in conquering the evil tendencies of nature ; in ever striving to acquire fresh virtues ; to increase in the love of God, to live and die in perfect union with His will ; the sanctity, in fact, which is summed up in the answer Our Lord gave to the lawyer : " If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."

If this be sanctity, what can hinder any one of us from attaining it? Certainly not the obligations of our calling ; for since we know, on the one hand, that all the various conditions of life are ordained of God, and, on the other, that He commands every man to work out his own sanctification, it follows as a necessary consequence that we can please God in whatever position His providence places us.

Some among my hearers may in their simplicity imagine that it is only by reciting the Rosary, hearing Mass, frequenting the sacraments, and the practise of other good works, that we can merit heaven. They are mistaken ; for among the actions whereby an eternal reward may be gained, we may reckon our daily labor, our domestic work, the fulfilling of the duties our state lays

upon us to the best of our ability ; for these, if combined with the observance of God's laws and the practice of virtue, constitute true sanctity.

For what is the valiant woman praised, who in Holy Scripture is proposed as a pattern and type of feminine perfection ? For having led an army to victory, like Debora ? for having slain the enemy of her country, like Jael ? or, for having, like Judith, decapitated a second Holofernes ? For nothing of this sort, but only because she has won the love and confidence of her husband ; because by day and by night she has worked with her hands, she has watched over the conduct of her children, the behavior of her servants, and given generous help to the poor. When the publicans and soldiers came to the Baptist asking him, " Master, what shall we do? " he did not tell them to fast and pray, to retire into the desert and lead a life of penance ; he merely told the former to take nothing more than their due, and the latter to do violence to no man and be content with their pay. Moreover, when our divine Lord spoke of the way in which we must follow Him in order to enter into heaven with Him, saying we must bear the cross, He gives us to understand that it is the cross appertaining to our state that He means. " If any man will come after Me, let him take up his cross and follow Me." He does not say, " Let him take up My cross," but his own ; that is the one he is intended to carry.

Nor must it be imagined that God intends all souls to be sanctified by the same means ; one is sanctified in one way, another in another way. The pages of hagiology show us in all ages countless numbers of men and women belonging to every class of society, from the highest to the lowest, who have become saints ; and even in the present day, when those who aspire to holiness have to encounter fierce opposition from the world around them, think you that there are not many holy

souls to be found in every state of life? you meet with fervent lovers of God where unbelievers abound, modest and chaste persons amid an atmosphere of corruption and sensuality, those who are pious and charitable, scrupulous observers of the laws of God and the Church under circumstances most unfavorable to devotion. There are many among the poor who accept the trials and privations of their lowly condition without a murmur for the love of God; laborers and artisans who sanctify their trial by resignation and brighten their lot in life by Christian hope, living and bringing up their children in the holy fear of God. And if, while trammelled by the cares and duties of their state, some can so far subordinate the interests of time to those of eternity as to merit to be raised to our altars; if, while surrounded by dangers, they can gallantly advance on the path of perfection, why cannot you all, without exception, do the same? You have not more to do than they have done and yet do; your weakness is not greater than theirs; your nature is not more depraved; your passions are not stronger and more difficult to combat.

You will, it is true, if you observe the law of God and practise the virtues of your state, have many repugnances to overcome, much labor to undergo, many struggles to sustain. The way to heaven is narrow, and the path is thorny; we are told that the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent alone bear it away; it is won at the cost of much anguish of spirit. But if the obstacles in the way of your sanctification are great, God gives you many and most efficacious aids to enable you to triumph over them. He has placed within your reach the sacraments, by means of which He communicates to you His grace, He renews your strength; He has given you an angel to be your companion, your invisible but potent protector throughout this life's pilgrimage; He

has bestowed on you, in our blessed Lady, the kindest and most loving of mothers, who will guide you, help you, protect you in your conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Another false notion in regard to sanctity, is the belief that in order to become saints it is necessary to do great and striking deeds, to perform extraordinary penances, and astonish the world by the singularity of your life. This is but a delusion of the devil. God is wonderful in His saints, and there are doubtless some in whom the light of sanctity manifests itself in a striking and miraculous manner. But there are thousands who occupy a high seat and wear a glorious diadem in heaven with whom this was not the case. St. John Berchmans, who died in the flower of his youth, having in a short time become a great saint merely through exactitude in the observance of his Bible, used to say: "Sanctity does not consist so much in doing great things, as in doing ordinary things well."

Look at Jesus Christ, the Saint of saints! during His life at Nazareth, until He was thirty years of age, He wrought no miracles. His days were passed in most commonplace actions, most humble labors. He who was to change the face of the world, to found a new kingdom—the kingdom of grace—lived in obscurity. He who was consummate sanctity, was employed in the ordinary work of a carpenter. Nor when He went about preaching the Gospel did He confirm His teaching by miracles unless this was necessary for His heavenly Father's glory.

The same may be said of our blessed Lady, the most holy of created beings. Her life in Egypt and at Nazareth was that of an ordinary woman of the working-class, the mother of a family. Quiet of speech, modest in dress, a lover of silence and retirement, there was nothing striking about her, nothing to distinguish her from others of her class, to attract special notice on the part of her neigh-

bors and acquaintances, and cause them to remark upon her extraordinary virtue.

No, my children, great and lofty deeds are not required of you in order to attain sanctity. The Child of Mary who on first waking offers to God the actions of the day on which she is entering; who endeavors to hear Mass daily, receives holy communion frequently, and devoutly performs all her other religious exercises; who is obedient to her parents and superiors, even when obedience involves a sacrifice; who watches over her own heart, and never deliberately commits a venial sin; who is careful to perform all her duties with a pure intention; who delights in reading and hearing the word of God; who eagerly embraces every opportunity of promoting the glory of God and the good of souls; who bears sickness and suffering with Christian patience and resignation, who, when injured or maligned, remembers the example of Our Lord, and stifles every feeling of anger, every wish for revenge, and in all her words, thoughts, and actions seeks only to please and serve God; such a one as this, without any grand achievements, will rapidly scale the heights of the most eminent sanctity.

I would have you, therefore, cherish a great desire to become saints, but remember that your desire must be accompanied by a strong will, a firm determination. We know that hell is paved with good intentions; it is only when they are united to a steadfast resolution that they are capable of conquering what appears unconquerable.

Resolve to keep the divine law, to fulfil the duties of your state as perfectly as possible. Resolve to mortify your senses; to take mortification as your guide and constant companion. Resolve, above all, to be instant in prayer, for this is indispensable to the attainment of sanctity. Act thus, and you may rest assured that your life will be holy, and your death will be even more so.

SERMON XXVI.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND TEPIDITY.

WHEN a young girl who has been enrolled in the pious association has passed through her time of probation, and, to her great delight, is admitted to the membership of the Children of Mary, she usually forms the generous resolve to give herself wholly to God, to imitate as closely as possible our blessed Lady, and herself become a saint. At the outset she advances with leaps and bounds in the way of virtue; nothing seems difficult, nothing daunts her courage; she surmounts all the obstacles in her path, and performs all her religious exercises, all the duties of her state, with a precision and assiduity which leaves nothing to be desired.

But as time goes on, this first fervor, this delicacy of conscience, this pious enthusiasm that made her a true Child of Mary, gradually cools down; she loses all zest in the service of God, her zeal languishes, she lapses into a state of sluggish inaction, she becomes a prey to that sad spiritual malady to which ascetic writers give the name of tepidity. It is a malady that leads the soul to abandon virtue, to incur the guilt of mortal sin, to enter the way of perdition; for, as Holy Scripture teaches us, unless we continually strive to advance, we go back; and he who, having once set out, turns back, is not fit for the kingdom of heaven. Thus, it is a malady that proves fatal to many a hapless soul.

In our conference to-day I intend to speak of the nature of tepidity and its terrible consequences; I shall then point out the means to be adopted in order

to recover from this disease, should any among you have contracted its taint; or to keep free from it, if, by God's grace, you are yet untouched by it.

Tepidity is the word used to describe the state of that soul, which, relaxing her efforts to serve God, experiences an habitual disinclination for spiritual exercises, and performs them—if she does not drop them altogether—in a sluggish, cold, and perfunctory manner. It is a state wherein the soul, though she shrinks from mortal sin, yet cares little to make progress in virtue; makes no effort to win heaven, and while she would not show herself the enemy of God, does not exert herself to gain His friendship. She is neither cold nor hot; neither to be counted among the just nor among the reprobate. Prayer, good works, her daily duties become a weariness to her; time slips by, and nothing is done towards forwarding the all-important work of her own salvation.

Here, I must warn you not to think tepidity the same as aridity of soul. The two have, it cannot be denied, certain points of resemblance, but in reality there is a great difference between them. The soul that is in a state of aridity feels no pleasure, finds no sweetness in the service of God; but the substance of devotion still remains, and the force of will which conscientiously fulfils every duty; whereas tepidity destroys not only the relish, but the good will, and fosters sloth and indifference.

Hence, we do not call that person tepid who, desirous to lead a devout life, is careful to mortify her passions, to practise virtues, to be regular at prayer and in approaching the sacraments, and to correct her faults; even though in consequence of untoward circumstances, many of her days are passed in darkness, sadness, and spiritual desolation, so that persistence in the right way becomes difficult and painful. The one who is really tepid is the Christian who, convinced of the vanity of the world, and

enamoured of the devout life, begins well; who is fervent, generous, scrupulous in the performance of every duty, but who, after a time, listens to the suggestions of the tempter. The enemy of souls whispers to her that all these pious practices belong to religious, that seculars are not called to a life of seclusion, of mortification, of penance; that God is satisfied if we keep His commandments, without wearing ourselves out with religious exercises. From that time forth the soul begins to feel a certain repugnance to, a weariness of, all that appertains to God's service; to despise as mere scruples custody of the senses, self-restraint, mortification. Her duties become irksome to her, a new life begins for her — a life not altogether worldly, yet not given to God; a life not actually reprehensible, yet devoid of good works; a life not of sin, but of laxity; a life that reminds one of the ornamental plants used to decorate the vestibules and staircases of mansions, which are admired, and certainly they are handsome, but no blossoms are ever seen on them. And because she is not guilty of grievous sins which would stamp her as a sinner, the soul lives on tranquilly in this state of habitual infidelity to grace; and her life presents a network of imperfections, or even of grave faults, although a false conscience does not recognize them as such.

Thus, as smoke renders the eyes dim, so tepidity enervates the soul, and blinds her to the terrible consequences it entails in regard to her eternal salvation. Shunning the means whereby she might be roused from her lethargy, she rocks herself gently to sleep; all movement, all action, all life being suspended, as if she already slept the sleep of death.

It happens sometimes that if, on hearing of the death of any one, you inquire what was the cause, you are told that it was a cold, a neglected cold. A cold! the most ordinary, the least dangerous of maladies! Yet, one

which, if neglected, may bring a man to the grave. The same is true of tepidity. This freedom of speech, these unguarded actions, these antipathies indulged; listless prayers; confessions without firm purpose of amendment, indevout communions, neglect of good works, of holy inspirations, lead by degrees towards mortal sin, and the death of the soul. Yes, the death of the soul; this is the natural end to which those come who tread in the downward path of tepidity. The Holy Spirit declares the same to all who think lightly of trifling omissions, the neglect of small things, warning them that they will ere long fall into the abyss of sin.

It is recorded of Teresa of Jesus, the seraphic saint of Carmel, that she was not always a model of sanctity, but at one period passed through a phase of languor and tepidity. At the convent in which she was professed, seculars were admitted to the parlor, and she began to forsake the solitude of her cell to enjoy their company. Soon she took delight in their conversation; her ardent nature formed attachments which, if not blameworthy, were undesirable; her mind was occupied with idle thoughts, and time was wasted in the parlor which ought to have been devoted to spiritual exercises. Instead of striving after perfection, she became tepid; and, as is always the case with souls that incline to worldly vanities, graces neglected were withdrawn, inspirations unheeded were withheld, the voice of conscience ceased to expostulate. Then the devil whispered to Teresa, insinuating that it was presumption in one who took such pleasure in familiar intercourse with seculars to venture to hold converse with God in mental prayer. Teresa lent her ear to the wily tempter; she abandoned meditation and gave herself to pastimes and frivolities. Well indeed was it for her that God, seeing that the ordinary inspirations of grace were ineffectual, recalled her to Himself by extraordinary means.

I will not attempt to describe the supernatural visions, the wonderful graces, the admonitions, unparalleled, perhaps, in the annals of the saints, which were lavished on this favorite of heaven. All resistance was at length overcome; she owned herself vanquished, and from thenceforth she resolutely avoided every dangerous occasion, and advanced so rapidly in virtue that she attained the most eminent sanctity and the most sublime perfection.

What would have been Teresa's fate had she continued in that state of tepidity? She would have fallen into mortal sin, she would have been lost eternally. This is not mere conjecture, it is certainty, for God Himself revealed to the saint the place that would have been hers in hell had she persisted in her fatal course.

Hence we see how perilous is the state of tepidity, not only for ordinary Christians, but for souls enriched with the choicest gifts of nature and grace, like St. Teresa. We may well tremble lest such be our condition; for although God, the absolute Ruler of hearts, of His mercy grants extraordinary grace to some, He withholds it from many. He withholds it from most. While He not only does not repel great sinners, but pursues them with unexampled loving-kindness, He expressly says that He holds the tepid in abhorrence, that He will exclude them from His sacred heart, and, far from receiving them with the tenderness He shows even to the hardened sinner, He will vomit them out of His mouth. This word vomit forcibly expresses the disgust God feels for the tepid soul, the detestation wherewith He regards it, the abandonment to which He condemns it, the destitution in which He leaves it. This explains the severe sentence passed upon the slothful servant, whose only wrong-doing was that he did not trade with the talent confided to him; the punishment inflicted on the foolish virgins, not for any violation of chastity, but, because they did

not keep alive the flame of charity, because they slumbered and slept; and the curse pronounced against the barren fig-tree because it produced leaves only and no fruit.

Let us now consider the remedies to be applied to this state of languor, of moral inertia, which is to the spiritual life what a chronic disease is to the body—of no immediate danger, but sapping its strength and dragging it by almost imperceptible degrees to the grave.

First of all, a resolute, energetic determination is needed. In this instance the will is the way; God helps those who help themselves; the assistance of grace is not denied to those who exert themselves to deserve it, and those who resolve to quit this state will be enabled to do so. It will not be an easy task, difficulties and sacrifices will not be wanting; but if obstacles abound we shall have grace to surmount them. God crowns with victory the strong, courageous soul, but He despises the pusillanimous and cowardly.

The second motive for amendment is indicated by the Apostle in the words: "I beseech you that you walk worthy of God, in the vocation in which you are called." Great indeed is the God we serve, and our duty obliges us to serve Him with anxious solicitude, striving to render Him the honor and glory which is His due. Our own interests also require us to do this, for by performing our religious duties, our daily work as faultlessly as possible, we may form a golden chain, each link of which signifies a degree of grace here, of glory hereafter.

Finally, remember the uncertainty of life, the shortness of the time given us to amass merits and win heaven. Holy Scripture bids us work while we have time, for no man knoweth the moment when death will put a stop to his labors. And when the last hour comes, the fervent will be rich in merits and virtue, whereas the

tepid, who had equal opportunities, and neglected to use them, will find himself with empty hands.

Examine your own hearts, therefore, my children, scrutinize your conscience to ascertain whether you are tepid or fervent. If it tells you that you are the latter, that you are worthy to be called the Children of Mary, give God thanks, and resolve to keep alive the flame of divine love within your heart. If, on the contrary, you pray little, and pray ill; if your venial sins are many, if your religious exercises are distasteful to you, if you have no zeal for God's glory, and are careless in regard to your daily duties; if by these signs you perceive that you are in a state of tepidity, rouse yourself at once, whatever it cost you. Act promptly; God preserve you from the fatal error of procrastination, which will assuredly bring you to perdition.

SERMON XXVII.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND THE LOVE OF GOD.

THE chief duty of the Christian is to love God, to love Him with his whole heart at the cost of any sacrifice, in the face of any danger, at the price even of life itself. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," it is written, "with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength." This is a great commandment, worthy of the great God who lays it upon us, worthy of the dignity of the Christian who has to keep it. It is a commandment that comprises in itself all others, because, as St. Paul says: "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, if I should know all mysteries, and have all knowledge, if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains; if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and deliver my body to be burned, and yet have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."

Undoubtedly, the love of God is the flower, the crown, so to speak, of Christian virtues; in relation to the other affections it is what the diamond is among precious stones, what gold is among metals—the most precious, the most perfect, the most pure. He who lives without this love, lives a life which is no life, but the prelude to eternal death. The great Apostle of Charity tells us: "He that loveth not, abideth in death."

I do not believe that any of you, my children, brought up as you have been in the knowledge of God, and singled out as the recipient of special favors, is destitute of a sincere love of God. Yet I feel urged to remind you of your duty in this respect, in order that you may increase

in love for Him, and love Him with that generous, intense affection which is ready to sacrifice everything, even life itself, for God.

The two principal motives we have for loving God are these: His perfections, and the benefits we receive from Him. Let us first consider His perfections. The heart of man, created by God for love, only lives by love; its every pulsation, its every movement, is inspired by love. And if love is the spontaneous movement of the heart, which cannot live without love, what more worthy object of its affections than God, the focus of all perfection, the source and centre of all that is good, of all that is admirable.

The infinite beauty of God, whereon the blessed gaze in ecstatic rapture, is depicted by the Spouse in the Canticles, under metaphors borrowed from what is human and earthly. She compares the Beloved to the stately cedars that crown the heights of Libanus; his head to the finest gold, his locks to branches of palm-trees, his eyes to dove's eyes; she describes him as white and ruddy, as altogether lovely. The delicate hues of the dawn, lighting up earth and sky, the majestic radiance of the sun, the tranquil loveliness of moon and stars, are but shadows, passing rays of the splendors of the Most High. The bright tints of the rainbow, the sparkle of the diamond, the brilliant plumage of the birds, the gay colors of the flowers, are but faint and feeble reflections of the Creator's glory. So unspeakable is His beauty that, the Fathers tell us, were all the hatred of God whereby the demons and the damned are animated concentrated in one single heart and multiplied a thousand times, the mere sight, for one instant only, of the divine countenance, were this vouchsafed to the unhappy man, would suffice to convert his insensate hatred into profound love, to fill him with a happiness as unbounded as his rage had formerly been.

What can be said of the goodness of God? It surpasses anything our imagination can conceive, for all that

is good in this world is only excellent because it derives its origin from Him who is infinite and supreme goodness, immeasurably superior to all that we admire in His creatures. The qualities of creatures are finite, imperfect, exhaustible; but the attributes of God, like a fathomless abyss, a boundless ocean, are never diminished, never otherwise than endless and illimitable. How bountiful He is in His care for His creatures; how munificent in the gifts He bestows on them; how omnipotent in His government of the universe!

But in vain shall we attempt to form any just conception of the glorious attributes and perfections of our God. All that is fair and excellent and perfect and amiable on earth, all that enchants the senses and captivates the heart, is a shadow, a mere nothing compared with the beauty, the goodness, the attractiveness of the Deity. "Who is equal to God?" was the cry of the Archangel Michael, when there was war in heaven. And the Psalmist in his turn asks: "Who is like to the Lord our God?"

Seeing how infinite are the perfections of our God, how supremely worthy He is to be loved, to be loved with our whole heart and mind and soul and strength, to be loved above all things, we could not fail to love Him even if this were not enjoined upon us by an express command. It is not, however, for Himself alone that He deserves to be loved, but for all that He does for us; for the gifts of nature and of grace which He lavishes upon us with so liberal a hand.

How can we enumerate the countless benefits by which we are surrounded, that envelop us as the air we breathe? Before you were created, God loved you; from all eternity He loved you. He called you into being, He endowed you with a rational soul, with the power of doing what is right, of earning the bliss of Paradise. In order that your life should be full of enjoyment, He has enriched the world with innumerable delights. Look around you, and

everything will speak to you of the infinite goodness of God. Nature with her endless variety of hill and plain, of wood and meadow; the treasures of sea and land, the wonders of earth and sky, the beauties of tree and flower, of bird and beast; the elements, the seasons fulfilling their course, all attest the incomparable bounty of God, the love He bears His creatures. He preserves you. He gives you the necessaries, the comforts of life; even if you have to work for them, still they are His gifts; He is the most tender, the most generous of fathers. And yet the gifts of nature, excellent as they are, sink into insignificance when compared with the gifts of grace.

It is by God's mercy that you have been born in a civilized, a Christian country, of God-fearing parents; that, as soon as you saw the light of day, your soul was cleansed in the regenerating waters of Baptism, and you were numbered among the children of God. It is of His pure love that He has given you His own Mother—the help of Christians, the consolation of the afflicted, the refuge of sinners, the gate of heaven—to be your mother, to watch over you, to obtain for you by her intercession the most signal graces. It is of His pure love that He has given you His only Son to be your elder Brother—Christ who was born, who lived, who suffered, who died for you, who shed all His blood for you, and now, in His infinite charity, invites you to come to Him for refreshment, to draw from His sacred heart the water of life eternal.

God has, moreover, made you members of His Church, thus giving you a sure and certain guide amid the darkness of doubt and error to direct your steps on the path to heaven. Out of love for you He has placed within your reach the treasury of the sacraments, which are the channels whereby he communicates His grace to your soul. Not only does He make you His own children in Baptism, but when, grown older, you begin to encounter

the dangers of the world, He endows you with the spirit of fortitude, signing you with the sacred chrism. And if by sin you stain your robe of innocence, He reconciles you to Himself in the Sacrament of Penance; He feeds you with the Bread of Angels; He comes to dwell in you, to live in you, to bind you to Himself in the closest union. If as a bride you stand before the altar, He clasps the marriage bond, He blesses your nuptials, He gives you the grace and succor you need. Finally, when your last hour comes, He imparts to you in Extreme Unction the strength to pass through that dread moment, to resist the last dire assaults of the evil one, to breathe forth your soul in peace.

Thus God is continually with you, withholding you from sin, inciting you to the practice of good works, hedging you round with His graces, calling you to Himself by the sweet odor of virtue, by showing you the emptiness and transitoriness of all that is not Himself, by contrition for sin, by the chastisement of sin, or one of the many means His divine love devises. And every prayer you utter, every virtue you possess, every good work you perform, every victory you win comes from Him, from Him alone. Great indeed are the benefits in the order of grace which God bestows upon you at every step of your way; innumerable the proofs He gives of love the most tender, the most generous, the most bounteous.

And now tell me, if the charm of a lovely countenance, if the attraction of some virtue which you discover in one of your fellow-creatures, is enough to captivate your affections; if even a slight benefit conferred on you awakens within you feelings of love and gratitude, can you regard with indifference that God in whom all perfections meet, who bestows benefits upon you most liberally every moment of your life? He is your truest Friend, your most loving Father; you have every reason to consecrate to Him your thoughts, your affections,

your mind, your soul with all its powers. Nor must your love be sterile, mere words and feelings; it must be effective, for deeds are the surest proof of love. Remember that Our Lord taught us this truth when He said to His disciples: "If you love Me, keep My commandments. He that keepeth My commandments, he it is that loveth Me"—he that respects My law and observes it faithfully.

Therefore, if the world tempts you to take part in its dissipations, if self-love tempts you to court admiration and flattery, if the devil tempts you to choose the path of ease and pleasure rather than the rugged road of Christian mortification, and for the love of God you resist all these seductions, if you check the natural rising of pride or anger, and serve God without fear of man, you will prove that you love God truly, that you are worthy Children of Mary. And as this virtue is the queen of virtues, since it includes in itself all other virtues, it is the most precious of all, the most desirable for the Christian to possess. Endeavor, therefore, to love God with all the force of your nature, and then there will be no virtue lacking to you, no sacrifice which you will not gladly make for His sake.

SERMON XXVIII.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND FILIAL DUTY.

AMONG the various duties in the fulfilment of which the Child of Mary ought to be an example to all around her, that of respect and love towards her parents occupies a prominent position. It is a duty both sacred and sweet; yet it is overlooked by some, who, while they perform other duties with laudable exactitude, appear to forget that they are required, both by the law of nature and the revealed commandments of God, to do all within their power to please their parents, to surround them with comforts, to anticipate their wishes, and render their declining years happy. I shall, therefore, ask you to listen to me with special attention while I speak to you to-day on the subject of your duty towards your father and mother.

It is the express and solemn command of God that we should reverence our parents. Read the decalogue, and you will find this to be the fourth precept: "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thou mayest be long-lived upon the land." Observe that when God wrote His law upon the two tables of stone, inscribing upon one the first three commandments comprising our duty towards Himself; on the second the seven others regarding our duty towards our neighbor, He placed foremost among the latter the command that we should honor our father and mother, to teach us that as our duty towards God demands primarily that we honor Him, so the law of charity towards our neighbor imposes on us the duty, first and foremost, of honoring our parents.

Nor is He content with enunciating this precept; to show the importance attaching to it, He fulminates terrible threats against those who break it. "Cursed be he that honoreth not his father and mother; he that lifteth up his hand against his father or his mother shall perish miserably, and become the prey of devils." The truth of these menaces are confirmed by the fate of Ophni and Phinees, who were slain by the foes of Israel on account of their disobedience to their aged father; by the fate of Absalom, who, for having rebelled against his father, King David, while caught by the hair in the branches of a tree was stabbed to the heart by an enemy; the fate of Cham, on whom fell an awful curse—a curse still resting on his unhappy descendants—for having called attention to his father while he was lying in a state of helpless inebriation.

Undoubtedly, your parents deserve all respect, seeing they are the representatives of God, His coadjutors in your regard, exercising over you an authority confided to them by Him. The same reason which obliges you to honor God holds good when your parents are concerned, for you ought to see Him in them. You respect your superiors, your directors, your teachers, who have but a partial authority over you; and should you show less reverence for your father and mother, since your duty to them is so intimately connected with your duty to God? As the Wise Man says: "He that feareth the Lord, honoreth his parents, and will serve them as his masters."

If, then, your duty requires you to treat your superiors with the utmost deference, how much the more does it require you to cherish a sincere esteem, a profound reverence for your parents, to repress every word, every gesture expressive of contempt, pride, or indifference to their wishes? It requires you to listen to their counsels, their reproofs, and their orders, with humility and submission; to do

nothing in defiance of their will, to undertake nothing of importance without asking their advice and obtaining their consent. It requires you always to speak kindly of them, to abstain from censuring their conduct, even though it be blameworthy, to bear uncomplainingly with their defects. As the Scripture says: "Son, support the old age of thy father, and grieve him not in his life: and if his understanding fail, have patience with him, and despise him not when thou art in thy strength." For granting that your father and mother have faults, even grave ones most difficult to put up with, this does not justify you in treating them with disrespect. Remember, that however much they try your patience, whatever sacrifices you have to make, they have had to make far greater sacrifices for your sake; besides, if we are only to respect those who are faultless, who are models of virtue and good sense, we shall have far to look, for no one on earth is perfect. God promises to reward largely the forbearance, the kindness, the reverence shown to parents in their old age. "In the day of affliction, thou shalt be remembered; and thy sins shalt melt away as ice in the fair warm weather."

Not only is it our duty to respect, but also to love our parents; this stands to reason, for if we are bound to love our neighbor, who is so near to us as they are? If we are told to love even our enemies, how shall we not love those who are, after God, our best friends, our greatest benefactors? Remember it is to them that you owe your existence, they brought you into the world. Remember the tenderness, the love with which they watched over your childhood, the anxiety, the cares, the discomfort they suffered for many years on your account; does not gratitude alone form a sufficient motive for loving your parents and devoting yourself to them? And if some among you should say: For my part, I have little to thank my parents for: they have not treated me kindly,

they have not set me a good example; let me remind you that there is no reason, because they have not done their duty, that you should not do yours. Ought we not to return good for evil? Moreover, see how good God is; in spite of the bad example of your parents, He has called you to become a Child of Mary. Who knows that this may not be on purpose that you might obtain their conversion. And if such be the will of God, will you not do well to follow it, and strive to procure their eternal salvation while seeking to work out your own?

And let me impress upon you not to rest content with words and protestations of affection—of faithful and sincere affection—for your parents, but to show it by your conduct. You ought to love them from the bottom of your heart, to love them both in times of adversity and of prosperity; to prove your love by the unhesitating sacrifice of your own wishes, by docility and submission to their will, by anxiety to please them, by setting aside your own interests, and omitting no occasion of promoting their welfare, adding to their comfort, and aiding them in their spiritual and temporal needs. Thus by your care and kind attentions, by rendering them all the assistance within your power, you may cheer and brighten the evening of their life.

We are told that Gustavus III., one of the best kings that ever ruled over Sweden, having lost his way while out shooting, came to a miserable little cottage in the forest where a young girl was drawing water from a well. The king, who was parched with thirst, went up to her, and asked for a glass of water. She gave it him, and when he had drunk it, he said: "My pretty maid, if you will come with me to Stockholm, I will make your fortune." "Even if I were so eager to make my fortune as to trust to your fine promises," replied the girl, not recognizing the stranger, "it would be quite impossible for me to accept your offer. My poor mother is infirm and ill,

she has no one to do anything for her except me, and nothing would induce me to leave her alone." "Where is your mother?" Gustavus inquired. "There," answered the girl, with a smile, as she pointed to the cottage, "that is our home." The king followed her to the lowly dwelling, and on entering, he saw an elderly woman lying on a wretched pallet, clothed in rags, and evidently a great sufferer. Touched at the sight of this poverty-stricken interior, Gustavus exclaimed: "Poor woman, how I pity you!" "I should be a thousand times more to be pitied, good sir," the sick woman rejoined, "were it not for my daughter; with her loving care and her industrious hands she does all she can to prolong my life. May God bless her and reward her abundantly!" and the tears ran freely down her poor thin cheeks.

Gustavus never felt more keenly the pleasure of his royal power than on this occasion. Turning to the dutiful damsel he placed his purse in her hand, saying: "Continue to take all the care you can of your mother; I shall soon find the means of making the task more easy for you. Farewell, my good girl; I am the king. I shall not forget you." On his return to the capital he settled an annuity on the mother, which was to pass, after her death, to her daughter.

It is also incumbent upon you, as the Children of Mary, more especially to succor your parents in their spiritual needs. It may be that they have neglected their religious duties, have been heedless of the one thing needful, and while in this condition they are attacked by a mortal malady. Then indeed you must manifest your love by your prayers for them, your earnest persuasions, your efforts to bring them back to God, and induce them to make their peace with Him. And if it please God to take them out of this world, be untiring in your prayers, your good works on their behalf, that they may be delivered from the fires of purga-

tory, where they are perchance detained on account of having been too indulgent towards you.

Happy are you, if you so love and venerate your parents that they thank God for having given you to them, if, like Tobias, they can call you the light of their eyes, the staff of their old age, the comfort of their life. Happy are you, if on their deathbed, their last look is one of love for you, if their last words breathe a blessing upon your head. Yes, happy are you, for the benedicdiction of the dying parent is ratified in heaven; and even in this life, our heavenly Father prospers and rewards the dutiful child.

SERMON XXIX.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND THE LAW OF LABOR.

WEARIED with a long and toilsome journey across the desert, the hermit Macarius one day knocked at the door of the cell inhabited by the Abbot St. Anthony. When he had entered and greeted the saint, the two recluses began at once to engage in converse on spiritual subjects. Not many minutes had elapsed before Macarius, looking round, perceived a heap of palm-branches cut ready for plaiting. He rose immediately, and taking some of them, began at once to make baskets, without allowing his work to interfere with his conversation, or his hands to rest while he talked. Anthony followed his example, but he noticed that his guest, although an older man than himself, and tired out with his journey, worked more quickly than he did.

Thus several hours passed in holy intercourse, during which the good old man never once relaxed his exertions. When it grew late, and he prepared to depart, Anthony could not refrain from falling on his knees before him; clasping both his hands in his, he kissed them reverently, saying: "Blessed hands, how great is your glory, you cannot rest unemployed even when on a visit, even after a long and toilsome journey!"

How I should rejoice, my dear children, if I could address to all of you the words uttered by this great saint; if I could say to you too: "Blessed are your hands, which are never unemployed." Blessed are you, if you shun idleness, if you are willing to submit to the law of labor which God has laid upon all mankind, if you accustom

yourself in your youth to perform the work suited to your state in life. For work is one of the chief duties of a Christian maiden; and she would violate the law of God, alienate from herself His graces, and lay herself open to fall into many sins, were she to waste in idleness and sloth the precious years of her life on earth. That this may not be the case with any of you, I purpose to-day to speak of work as a duty, and also to suggest to you the means of sanctifying your work, so that it may be profitable not only for the present life, but, what is of far greater importance, for the life to come.

If our first parents had not rebelled against God's commandments, work would have been to mankind merely a pleasant pastime, an agreeable exercise. But from the day that Eve lent her ear to the wily serpent, and in her fall involved the ruin of the human race, the law of labor has been a malediction passed upon all. "Because thou hast eaten of the tree," the Lord said to Adam, "whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat, cursed is the earth in thy work; with labor and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life; in the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread until thou return to the earth out of which thou wast taken." Thus man is condemned to labor as a punishment of his disobedience. The sin of Adam lives on in his posterity, and they have to suffer the consequences of it.

In the pages of Holy Scripture we are constantly reminded that work is the portion of man here below. "Go to the ant, O sluggard," we read in the Proverbs, "consider her ways, and learn wisdom, lest want come upon thee, and poverty." And in the Book of Job: "Man is born to labor and the bird to fly." But we cannot find this truth more clearly exemplified than in the life of Christ, our Model and Exemplar. Behold how He who is the Lord of heaven and of earth, beneath whose feet are all nations of the world, whose behests all the

hosts of angels reverently obey, chose to be the reputed son of a poor artisan, and passed all the best years of His earthly life laboring day by day at the humble trade of a carpenter, earning His bread like the lowliest of mortals. And when, at the age of thirty, He left the workshop at Nazareth to fulfil His mission to mankind, what life could be more laborious, more fully occupied than His! And wherever He preached, to whomsoever He preached, to rich and poor, to learned and unlearned, to the just or to sinners; whether He spoke in parables, or proclaimed His divine maxims in simple language, He invariably inculcated upon His hearers the obligation of labor and the duty of profitably employing their lives.

The apostles likewise, trained in the school of their divine Master, were diligent and hard-working. This they were even before they were called by Him; He would not have chosen them as His followers had they been idle and unoccupied. Nor did the work of the ministry, the care of souls and of the infant Church, their journeyings and fatigues, prevent them from pursuing their original calling. St. Paul, although a highly educated man, did not disdain to earn his bread by manual labor. Addressing the Thessalonians, he exhorts them to imitate the conduct of the apostles: "For we were not disorderly among you, neither did we eat any man's bread for nothing, but in labor and in toil we worked night and day, lest we should be chargeable to any of you. We have heard there are some among you who walk disorderly, working not at all; we charge them by the Lord Jesus Christ, that working with silence they would eat their own bread." Read the lives of the saints, and you will find that the greatest among them had the highest esteem for work; that neither man nor woman of eminent virtue neglected the sacred duty of labor. You, who are Children of Mary, can have no more illustrious example than that of your glorious Mother.

From her earliest childhood she employed herself usefully in her parents' house; in the Temple at Jerusalem she learned to spin and to embroider, with all other work suitable to her age and position. In the holy house at Nazareth, during Joseph's lifetime and after his death, she fulfilled all the household duties devolving on the mother of a family without any one to assist her. Let us therefore learn of Jesus and Mary to love work; it is a duty binding upon all, most especially upon the young.

Moreover, what a terrible vice idleness is! What harm does it not bring in its train; it may be said to be the father of all evil. In vain do we seek fair blossoms of virtue, a keen love for the things of God in one who is given up to sloth; the exercises of religion are irksome to her; she shirks her daily duties; her heart is enslaved by folly and vanity. Evil thoughts enter into her soul like hostile troops into an unfortified city; it is given up to plunder, license prevails everywhere. When David forsook the law of the Lord, it was not while he was combating the foes of Israel, nor while he was framing wise laws for his subjects, but while he was living in luxurious repose. Samson retained his prodigious strength while he fought the Philistines, but when he trifled away his time with a woman he became impotent in the hands of his adversaries. Idleness leads to irreligion, to license, to every kind of mischief. St. Jerome in his letters to the Roman ladies who sought his spiritual advice, urges on them to beware of this dangerous vice. St. Philip Neri, in his exhortations to young people, warns them against ever allowing the enemy of their souls to find them unemployed. For that cunning and experienced adversary knows full well that when he comes to suggest evil thoughts, to incite you to bad actions if he finds you busy and industrious he is impotent to harm you; but if he finds you given over to sloth and indolence he can easily draw you into his snares.

Make it your habit, therefore, to be constantly employed; let those work who have to earn their bread, and let not those who live at home in easy circumstances think themselves exempt from the obligation. Surely in the management of a household there is much to be done in which you could usefully take part, either in helping your parents or taking care of your brothers and sisters. God forbid that you should do as some young women do who begin the day late—devote a great part of it to the adornment of their persons, and fritter away the remainder in pastimes and frivolities. Imitate rather the valiant woman described in the Proverbs, who was untiring in providing for the wants of her household; or, like some wealthy ladies in our own day, make use of your time and talents in working for the needy, teaching the ignorant, or helping to adorn the house of God.

But it is not enough that you should work, you must work with God and for God. If your work is to accomplish its most important end, if heaven is to be its reward, it must be done in a state of grace and in union with Jesus Christ.

Above all, it is indispensable that your conscience should be free from mortal sin. We know that unless we are in a state of grace we can merit nothing, we cannot please God; all our labors, however assiduous and untiring; all good works that we perform, works of charity and mercy, though they be, cannot claim any reward in heaven. How much labor is spent, how much time wasted, how many merits which might be acquired are lost to the soul, if she is not in a state of grace! At the close of a life of activity, when she appears before her Judge, she will find her hands empty, and be compelled to say, like the apostles: "We have labored all the night, and have taken nothing!"

Take heed, therefore, that your work is done in the grace of God, and that it is done in union with Jesus

Christ. Offer it to Him as your final end; offer it as the accomplishment of His holy will, who laid this obligation upon the sons of Adam. This is the best, the surest way of sanctifying all that you do.

And if you feel weary or disheartened, remember that in your daily toil you have a companion in Jesus Christ, who labored for years in the workshop at Nazareth. Remember the recompense awaiting you in heaven, which, as the Apostle says, infinitely outweighs the tribulations of this life. Begin your work by offering it to God; ask His blessing upon it; while pursuing it think of your eternal country, and when it is ended, give God thanks for His gracious assistance.

My children, whatever be the state in which Providence has placed you, fulfil this divine law of labor cheerfully and from a sense of duty. Be always occupied; never let the devil find you idle; sanctify your work in the spirit of religion, and one day you will reap in heaven the precious fruits of what you have sown on earth.

SERMON XXX.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND THE SERVICE OF GOD AND THE WORLD.

THERE is no member of the family or of society for whom there is a fiercer contest than a young woman in the bloom of her youth. For a time God and the world struggle for the supremacy within her heart: God desiring to make her abound in the fruits of holiness, to render her worthy to consort with angels, the devil striving to drag her down to the lowest depths of depravity. She is a prize to be contended for, and the battle is a fierce one. Happy is she if she listens to the gentle voice of the Saviour, who says: "Come to Me, O My beloved, I will set up My throne within thy heart, I will make it My chosen dwelling-place," if she surrenders herself freely to His service, resolves to please Him only, to contract with Him a holy alliance, to consecrate to Him her thoughts, her affections, her whole self. But, on the other hand, how deplorable the fate of one who, having begun well, having run in the way of virtue, is unable to resist the fallacious promises, the flattering seductions of the world, and breaks her good resolutions, forsaking her divine Lord for earthly pleasures.

And now, lest you, who are at present faithful and loving servants of God, should perchance at a future day, dazzled by the allurements of worldly vanities, be led away to give yourself up to them, I purpose to set before you who God is, what are His precepts, what is the reward He promises to His followers; and, on the other

hand, what the world is, what are its maxims, what is the recompense it offers to its votaries.

Who then, let us ask, is God? He is the King of kings, the Lord of lords; He is in Himself Wisdom, Omnipotence, Holiness, Justice, Benignity, Goodness. He is your Creator, your Preserver; to Him you owe every advantage of birth and education, every good inspiration, every gift you possess of nature or of grace. He is the light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world; the great Sun of justice, which vivifies every creature. In a word, He is the first beginning of all things, the life of every soul, and the end for which it was created.

And the world? It is the inveterate enemy, the irreconcilable adversary of God; it is deceit, selfishness, injustice, hatred, imposture, everything that is evil. It values naught but position, riches, pleasure; it delights in oppressing the weak, persecuting the saints, deriding religion and virtue. This is the world of which Scripture says: "If any man love the world the charity of the Father is not in him." "Whosoever will be a friend of this world becometh an enemy of God." The world, in fact, for which our kind and loving Redeemer refused to pray: "I pray not for the world."

Since God and the world are such irreconcilable foes, it follows that their maxims, their counsels are diametrically opposed. The world bids its votaries have a good time while they are young; enjoy life while it lasts, drink the inebriating cup of pleasure, accumulate wealth, wherewith alone they can become great, procure the gratification of their desires, and enjoy the esteem of men. All appears so fair, so fascinating; you have only to put out your hand to pluck the flowers that grow beside your path; to satisfy your natural craving for enjoyment, for admiration, for excitement by participating in the amusements, the festivities, the dissipations of the world.

God, on the contrary, only speaks of ease, of honors, of

pleasures of external show and glitter, all that the world prizes and desires, in order to condemn them. He holds aloft the cross, the symbol of suffering and sorrow, saying: "If any man will come after Me, let him take up his cross and follow Me." I have come to wage war against the world and its follies; My disciples are required to engage in this warfare. They must condemn as worthless all that the world holds out to allure them; they must regard its honors, its riches as hindrances to the acquisition of an eternal crown. The world declares the rich to be blessed; I, on the contrary, say: "Blessed are the poor." The world cries: "Blessed are those whose life is spent in mirth and gayety;" I, on the contrary, say: "Blessed are those whose lot is one of affliction and crucifixion, of grief and privation." The world deems those blessed who are honored and revered; I, on the contrary, say: "Blessed are the lowly, those whom the world despises and ridicules." The world requires its followers to delight in dissipation, diversions, and merry-making; I, on the contrary, require mine to live in retirement and solitude. The world mocks at the sound of fasts, abstinences, and mortifications; I enjoin these on my servants. The world regards the meek and patient as pusillanimous, mean-spirited, it approves of pride and boasting; I command those who are my disciples to be patient, submissive, forgiving—to be humble of heart and docile as little children.

It cannot be denied that all this is somewhat painful to human nature, corrupted, weakened as it is by the fall; it is a thorny road which lies before you, but it is the only one for the Christian. He who would follow Christ, must be prepared for humiliations, crosses, tribulations; if he has not the strength to bear them, he cannot be His disciple.

Such are the maxims of God and of the world, in direct opposition, as you see, to one another; you will have to

adopt one or the other, according as you choose whom you will serve.

But what is the reward which God and the world respectively offer to their followers? Ah! my children, the world begins with sweet things and ends with bitter. It holds out to the young especially, happiness and pleasure, it attracts them by its allurements, but how dearly they have to pay for these! Beneath the blossoms on its flowery paths are concealed sharp thorns of remorse, disenchantment, despair. How bitterly those repent who trust its treacherous promises! what anguish it prepares for them at the hour of death!

We are told that Themistocles' father, pointing out to his son a dismantled and disabled hulk, stranded on the shore, said to him: "Behold how the world treats its votaries." And the great Cardinal Wolsey is known to have said when dying: "Had I served my God as I have served my king, He would not have left me to end my days in sorrow and disgrace." Alas for those who are deceived into trusting the specious promises of the world into serving so deceitful, so ungrateful a master! Their bright dreams, their glittering hopes vanish into smoke; smiles are changed into tears, roses into thorns, joys into sorrows which last to all eternity.

On the other hand, how ineffable are the delights wherewith God recompenses those who serve Him with love and fidelity! Even in this life He promises them peace; He assures them that His yoke will be light, that in humiliation they will find true glory, in the cross true happiness. Not only does He fortify them by His grace to rise superior to the trials they encounter, but He makes those trials so sweet, that they find more joy in them than in all earthly pleasures. The Apostle Paul, amid all his toils, his persecutions, his scourgings, his imprisonments was enabled to say: "I exceedingly abound with joy in all my tribulations." St. Teresa was so overcome

with the sweetness she experienced in the service of God, that she fainted away. St. Francis Xavier, who labored day and night without taking rest for the evangelization of India, unable to contain himself on account of the consolations that inundated his soul, cried: "Enough, O Lord, enough!" St. Bernard also declares that the joys of the world appear like sorrows when compared with the happiness that is to be found in the service of God. And to descend to more lowly examples in more recent times, were not weak women seen, at the time of the French Revolution, to encounter death at the hands of the executioner with calmness and joy for the cause of religion? Nay, even children have been known to do the same. It is related that during the massacre of the Christians in Japan, that Bl. Charles Spinola, the head of the mission, seeing among those who were awaiting death the mother of a rich family, whose young son he had recently baptized, approached her, and asked where she sent little Ignatius for safety? Thereupon a smiling face peeped out from the folds of her dress, and a childish voice exclaimed: "I am here, Father. They wanted to take me away, and promised me all manner of things, but I hid myself that I might go to heaven with you."

Well may we cry with the Psalmist: "Blessed are they that fear the Lord, that walk in the way of His commandments!" "Taste and see that the Lord is sweet to all those who serve Him!"

And forget not that this unspeakable joy which is the portion of God's faithful servants even on earth is nothing in comparison to the crown of unending felicity which He prepares for them to all eternity. If a cup of cold water given in His name obtains an eternal reward, what is not reserved as the recompense of the merits of a pious and devout life? God Himself will be the reward of those chosen souls. I, He says, am thy reward exceeding great; in Me, the Supreme Good, you will find the satis-

faction of all your desires; I dispose to you a kingdom as the guerdon of your services. What higher bliss than to be forever in the presence of God; to enjoy the company of our blessed Lady and the saints to all eternity!

Seeing, then, what God is, what are His precepts, what is the reward His servants receive, and on the other hand, what the world is, what are its maxims, and how it repays its followers, is there one among you who would turn away from God and devote herself to the service of the world?

That the service of God is at the outset painful and bitter cannot be denied. We must suffer, for if consolations always abounded we should have our recompense here, and virtue would no longer be virtue; we must suffer, for otherwise we should not sigh for our celestial country, we should not raise our hearts to Him who is the source of all good; we must suffer, for the crown of eternal glory is not woven out of earth's perishable blossoms. Remember also that the time of suffering is short, that the day will soon come when the thorns shall be converted into flowers, anguish into consolation, and death itself will be the commencement of our true life. Remember that God is ever near those who trust in Him, He is ready to assist and strengthen them with His grace, to enable them to run in the way of His commandments. Remember that He is a faithful, a generous Master, who will not leave the slightest service unrewarded.

Take courage, therefore, my children, and continue to serve the Lord, your God, with a perfect heart and a willing mind. I know you love God and wish to do right; but you are young and inexperienced, you know not the deceptions of the world, you are ignorant of the nets she spreads to ensnare her victims. Resolve, therefore, henceforth to let the world have but a small share in your life, only as much as your state demands, and

consecrate the remainder to your daily duties, to prayer and good works. Resolve to banish from your heart all love of the world, all longing after its vain delights; and ever keep in mind that all in this life, except the service of God, is illusion, deceit, and vexation of spirit.

SERMON XXXI.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND THE GOOD THINGS OF THE WORLD.

THE craving after happiness is one of the strongest instincts of human nature. All men court this enchanting siren, all long to possess her, they pursue after her, and in the hope of attaining her, they run wherever they think she is to be found. Some imagine that happiness consists in honor and renown, and with feverish anxiety they strive to climb higher in the social scale, to rise above their fellow-men. Some imagine that happiness is to be purchased by wealth, and to gain money they toil day and night, they undertake long journeys, they sacrifice health and comfort; some even sell their soul, relinquish their hope of heaven for a few acres of land, a few bags of gold. Others—and they are the most foolish of any—imagine that happiness is to be found in a life of license; they give themselves up to dissipation, gambling, and carnal gratifications. Alas, how vain is all their labor!

And yet there are many young people who sigh for the frivolous joys of earth, who pursue them eagerly, as if in them alone true happiness was to be found. Are there, perchance, among you, Children of Mary, whose hearts should be detached from all worldly things, any who are thus deceived? If so, believe me, honors, riches, pleasures, are incapable of satisfying the heart of man; they have to be dearly bought, and when acquired they prove insipid to the taste and the most uncertain of possessions.

The Evil One, who tempted Eve in Paradise to eat the

forbidden fruit, now makes use of the same wiles in regard to her descendants in the world. He puts before them the good things of this life—riches, honors, and pleasures —surrounded by a fictitious glamour; he represents them under so seductive an aspect that thousands are captivated by it, and believing they will afford them boundless felicity, they pursue with avidity the false and fleeting phantoms of earth. But as Eve, instead of tasting a new and untried happiness in consequence of having eaten the forbidden fruit, only found it brought her trouble and affliction and remorse and death, so those who love terrestrial joys and think to find in them the happiness for which their nature craves, only meet with disappointment, sorrow, and pain.

Yes, my children, on whatever class you cast your glance, you will see how large a proportion of the aspirants after this world's good things are obliged to feed on hopes and projects; how many fail to obtain the post they covet; how many, where they expect to find warm friendship, encounter coldness and heartlessness; how many are merely mocked by fortune when they court the fickle goddess! How many expect each year to grasp the good things they long for, while these retreat before them, like the mirage in the desert; they seem to be near the Promised Land, and, like Moses, they view it spread out before them, but at last are constrained reluctantly to admit that they will never enter into it.

And even if, at the cost of toil and suffering, they attain the coveted prize, can they be called happy? No; the word of God cannot deceive: it expressly tells us that the path of those who seek this world's goods is one of bitter disappointment; one in which the wayfarer enjoys no peace or serenity, and he who reaches the goal finds the fair fruits turn to dust at his touch, and only experiences mortification and regret instead of joy and triumph.

Nor can we indeed expect this to be otherwise. God

has made us for no other end but that we should know Him, and knowing Him, our intelligence should rest satisfied with Him; that we should love Him, and loving Him, our will should desire nothing further; that we should possess Him, and possessing Him, our heart should be contented. Thus, however attractive creatures may be, we are not made for them, they cannot give us happiness; imperfect, defective as they are, they are unable to fill our heart, however much we give ourselves up to them. It is only the votaries of the world, who know nothing of the things of God, who consider those to be envied who live a life of pleasure, who are honored and looked up to. Our heart aspires to something nobler than the poor delights of this world; it is made for God, and in Him alone can it find peace and happiness.

Remember the well-known saying of St. Augustine: "Thou hast created us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart has no rest until it rests in Thee."

The testimony of Solomon, the wisest, the most prosperous of mankind, confirms the truth of these words. He reached the summit of earthly felicity; a monarch unrivalled in the extent of his dominions, the splendor of his possessions, the greatness of his power, his wisdom and knowledge, his majesty and magnificence. Who, according to man's judgment, would not esteem such a one happy? Yet hear the conclusion he comes to after the enjoyment of all that wealth and power can procure: "I saw all things to be vanity and vexation of spirit."

What are we intended to learn from the fact that the pleasures of earth, although when seen from afar they appear so fascinating, yet, when brought close to us, when placed within our reach, do but pall upon us and weary us? How is it that the fortunate ones of the world, while surrounded by the most refined pleasures, while revelling in ease and grandeur, yet feel the sharp thorns of sorrow and affliction? How is it that no man, even

if he has all that heart can desire, is really contented and happy? The reason of it is this, as I have already said, the good things of earth cannot give us the bliss for which we sigh, God alone is able to satisfy the human heart.

The prophet Isaias compares those who seek their happiness in the possession of this world's goods to a man devoured by thirst in his sleep; he dreams that he puts his parched lips again and again to the goblet, he imagines he holds it in his hands, and takes long draughts from it; but when he wakes his thirst is still unquenched. So those who take up the enchanting chalice of pleasure, though they drink deeply of its contents, cannot wet their fevered palate.

It may be, my children, that some of you, pilgrims in a land where all around attracts and charms you, are at this very moment idealizing one or other of these fleeting possessions, crediting it with the power to make your whole life happy, were you fortunate enough to win it. Be warned by me that there is nothing more delusive and contemptible than honors, pleasures, and riches. While you are still in the spring-time of your days, engrave upon your mind the words of the Wise Man: "All things under the sun are vanity and vexation of spirit." Lay to heart this truth as those did who in the flower of their youth, with the fairest future before them, spurned all that their beauty, their rank, their talents offered them in this world, and treading under foot the flowers that blossomed on their path, fixed all their thoughts, their hopes on those honors, riches, and pleasures which only content the soul and never pass away.

Yes, my children, our heart is indeed made for God, for a happiness that will know no end, a happiness which nothing on earth can afford us. What, after all, are these riches, however fabulous in amount? what is power, however great in extent? what are these delights, so enviable in appearance? They are like the gigantic statue

the prophet saw in the midst of a wide plain; the head of gold, the breast of silver, the legs of iron, and the feet of clay. Magnificent as it appeared to all who beheld it, it was doomed to swift destruction; struck by a stone which rolled from the mountain it fell and was shattered to pieces. This statue was the emblem of four great kingdoms which were to fall before the Church founded by Jesus Christ; but it is also an apt figure of the good things of the world. A word, a single act, an illness, what appears a mere chance or coincidence, but is in reality the finger of God, will suddenly lay low and bring to misery one who seemed to be in every way favored by Fortune. Look at Job; no position could apparently be more secure than his; in all the East there was no one equal to him in opulence and power. Yet, in a brief space of time all his prosperity deserted him; he lost house, lands, flocks, even his sons and daughters. And in modern times, in every clime, instances are constantly met with to prove how precarious, at the best, is the hold man has upon the riches, the honors, the pleasures he pursues so eagerly. Who, though he have the wealth of Crœsus, is safe from the blows of adverse fortune? Who has health so robust or beauty so admired as to defy the ravages of disease and the fatal work of time? How many whom the world applauds to-day, it reviles to-morrow; how many, who now inhabit a mansion, may ere long be begging their bread!

Such is the true character of the good things that dazzle the eye and enslave the heart; the things for which you long, which you fancy will make you happy. Toil and misery has to be undergone in order to acquire them; when acquired, they fail to satisfy the heart, and from one moment to another they are liable to vanish like a shadow, more swiftly, as the Scripture says, than the post that flieth by. Oh, never let this feverish passion for the good things of earth take possession of

your heart! Look not at them as the devil depicts them to you, but in their true colors; in reality they are fallacious, perishable, productive only of pain and distress. Trust not his specious promises; he is a deceiver, who speaks fair, but does not give what he promises; who flatters his victims, but only to render their disenchantment more terrible.

Remember that this world was not given to us as a garden, wherein to wander at will, and cull its bright and fragrant flowers; but as a place of pilgrimage, through which we must reach the land of everlasting joys. Woe to that soul who while on this journey turns aside from the right way, and sets her face in the opposite direction, seeking honors, riches, pleasures! What will be her despair when at the close of her life she hears the fatal words: "Alas, unhappy one! thou hast taken the wrong road: it is now too late to retrace thy steps."

SERMON XXXII.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND HUMAN RESPECT.

In the present day, although so much is said about liberty and independence, people seem afraid to do right. What is evil alone ventures to show its face openly; the good hides its head and disguises itself under some other form. In the present day, although an outcry is made about the horrors of crime, the hideousness of vice, the beauty and excellence of virtue, as a matter of fact, crime stalks about unabashed and vice wears a bold mien; whereas good and virtuous people, with due exceptions, seem ashamed to show their face, and too many, allowing themselves to be influenced by a despicable feeling of human respect, forsake the straight road and are led astray into crooked paths.

The number of those who have the courage to hold entirely aloof from the world, to disregard its maxims, to pay no heed to its customs, to defy its ridicule; who fearlessly trample under foot human respect; who are not ashamed to profess the faith of their fathers, to honor it by word and deed, is, alas! but a small one. The majority of Christians nowadays, if the service of God exposes them to observation, afraid of a word of derision or contempt, are too apt to desert the standard of Christ and enrol themselves under the banner of the world.

Lest any of you should be tempted to act in a manner so unworthy of a Christian, let me speak to you to-day concerning human respect, and show you what it really is, so that you may not be swayed by the opinion of the world, as the weathercock turns with every breath of

wind, and disobey your conscience to avoid displeasing your fellow-men.

What, then, let us ask, is human respect? It is moral weakness, which leads one, instead of speaking and acting in accordance with the dictates of conscience and the law of God, to shape one's words and one's actions in accordance with the maxims of the world; this arises from a foolish fear that in doing otherwise one would lay one's self open to censure, to ridicule, if not to persecution and scorn. "What will the world say of me," a young woman asks herself, "if I live in so retired a manner, if I dress so quietly, if I go to the sacraments so often? I shall certainly be called a devotee, a narrow-minded bigot;" and thus, conquered by human respect, one by one she drops the practices of piety, grows cold in the service of God, and gradually takes up with a life of worldliness and dissipation. "What will the world say of me," another thinks to herself, "if I am seen to wear the medal of a Child of Mary, if I prefer converse with God rather than with my fellow-creatures, if I prefer attendance at church to visiting the theatre, if I prefer to listen to the Divine Word rather than to the idle tattle of the ball-room? Assuredly, I shall be said to be childish, affected, absurd;" and so human respect prevails, and another of its unhappy victims leaves the path of godliness, to lead a worldly if not a totally irreligious life.

Oh, how foolish is that maiden, especially if she be a Child of Mary, who allows herself to be dominated by human respect, to be so far enslaved by the opinion of the world as to neglect the obligations of the association, or, perhaps, in oblivion of her spiritual interests, to give up her connection with it altogether! What, in fact, is this world, whose biting words, whose contemptuous sneers men so greatly fear? It is the embodiment of the maxims and the principles, the manners and the habits which are diametrically opposed to the Gospel of Jesus

Christ. It is the world which in its blind folly refused to receive Our Lord, to recognize in Him the Son of God, despite the manifest proofs He gave of His divinity. It is hypocritical, delusive, ensnaring; it is one of the three great enemies of our salvation. And to regulate your conduct according to the maxims and teaching of an adversary of God, an enemy of your own soul, would be as madly foolish as to entrust yourself to the guidance of a blind man, or one who knows nothing of the road you desire to follow.

And, after all, are you sure that this world whose strictures you dread knows anything about you? Or if it knows you, will it interest itself in your actions? The small circle among whom you move know you, but undoubtedly among them there are at least some persons who are religious; who love virtue and honor it in others; who, far from ridiculing the pious maiden who fulfils her duty to God and to her parents, who obeys the voice of conscience instead of listening to the ideas and caprices of others, respect and esteem her for so doing. The world, then, which you find so formidable, may be reduced to a few individuals who, having abandoned the faith themselves, deride it in others; or, having given up the practices of religion, speak contemptuously of those who observe them; or think themselves qualified to criticise everything, to censure everything, and who often in their heart of hearts admire what they profess to despise, and secretly envy the virtue they openly declaim. Surely these are not the people whose opinions you ought to study, whose tastes you should strive to please, adopting their way of thinking, their manners of life, and forgetting, in your efforts to avoid their adverse criticism, that you are thereby forfeiting the esteem of all good people.

Nor must you delude yourself with the belief that by stifling the voice of conscience to please the world, the world will respect and admire you. No; once it has

made you its slave, it may perhaps flatter you to your face, but behind your back it will laugh at your cowardice. It may perhaps make a semblance of thinking much of you, but in reality it will judge you as you deserve. For although the world by no means loves virtue, yet it knows its worth and when it speaks dispassionately, it will freely praise it and scornfully denounce the despicable conduct of those who, for human considerations, turn aside from the service of God.

Never, my dear children, let it be said of you that you have forsaken your pious practices and conformed to what is reprehensible because of the world's mockery, the world's sarcasms. Accede to its demands as far as you can without offending against God; but if you are required to give up your religious exercises and live according to its maxims, then pay no heed to its threats, spurn its temptations, and say boldly: "Go behind me, Satan; I am a Child of Mary."

Do not imagine that superhuman and heroic courage is necessary to do this. The world, it is true, hates and persecutes the servants of God; this it has always done. If you show that you are afraid of it, if you give way before it, it will grow more bold, and give you no peace until it has yoked you to its triumphal car. But if you stand resolute and unflinching like a rock in the ocean; if you resist firmly, challenging your adversary to do his worst, and declaring you will continue to do as you think right, he will retire abashed and defeated, and molest you no more. Thenceforward you will be free to serve God in peace and tranquillity, blessed by Our Lord, beloved by Our Lady, and, moreover, respected and esteemed by your fellow-men, who always respect those who have the courage of their convictions.

As an instance of this, let me tell you of a young French gentleman who was invited to a grand dinner-party in Paris. During the first courses he ate nothing, refusing

the most dainty viands that were handed to him. "Are you not well?" asked his neighbor at table, who was himself doing ample justice to the elaborate *menu;* "you seem to have no appetite."

"On the contrary," the young man replied, "I am very hungry."

"Your taste must be very fastidious, if there is nothing here to tempt your palate," his neighbor rejoined, "or perhaps you are a vegetarian?"

"By no means; I have already partaken of a little fish; on any other day you would see me eat heartily of meat."

"On any other day? Oh, I understand!" And leaning forward, the gentleman, a former member of the Government, addressed his hostess: "Madam," he said sneeringly, "you did not warn me that we were to dine in the company of a saint. This gentleman is eating nothing because to-day happens to be Friday!"

All the guests smiled; the lady of the house looked somewhat embarrassed; the young man alone preserved his composure. "You may laugh," he said: "I am only doing my duty in keeping the law of the Church."

Before any disparaging remarks could be made, a young lady, the only daughter of one of the wealthiest and most distinguished persons at the table, said in a clear voice, so as to be heard by all present: "You appear to find this very comical, gentlemen, but I really see nothing to laugh at. A man who has the courage of his opinions is always a man of worth. It is the act of a poltroon to hide one's self in the presence of an adversary."

These words turned the tide in the young man's favor. Every one declared that he agreed with the speaker; and one of the guests went so far as to acknowledge that instead of joining in the laugh at his neighbor's expense, he ought to have done as he did, for he too was a Catholic and a Christian.

If, therefore, my children, the world, taking advantage

of your inexperience annoys you with its censure and its ridicule, take no heed of it. You were not made for the world, you are not called to follow the world, but to follow Jesus Christ. Was not your divine Master mocked at and insulted by the world? When He journeyed throughout Palestine, preaching the good tidings to the people, showing them the way to heaven, He was called a seducer of the people, one who desired to make Himself a king. When He sat at table with publicans in order to convert them, He was said to delight in the company of sinners. When He gave sight to the blind, as the miracle could not be denied, He was declared to be a violator of the law, a Sabbath-breaker. And when the multitudes hung on His lips, enraptured with His teaching and the wonders He wrought, the world persisted in terming Him a sinner, a madman, a fool.

And, if Our Lord, to test your love for Him, wishes you to undergo like treatment from the world, will you be so pusillanimous, so ungenerous, as to refuse to bear Him company? Will not you, who call yourselves His disciples, rather suffer anything than take on you the yoke of the world, and conform to its principles? Study the examples of the apostles: when requested and required by the Jews to desist from preaching, they boldly asserted that they ought to obey God rather than man. And after being scourged and treated as malefactors, they went away rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus. Think how many, not only men, but women and children in the early ages of the Church, shed their blood for the faith of Christ; what persecution they endured, what excruciating tortures they suffered, what cruel deaths they died, rather than in any way prove traitors to their faith.

Let examples such as these give you courage to bear, not indeed tortures and death, but a word of derision, a sarcastic smile, a sneer, perhaps a threat. Remember

that it is only those who have confessed Him before men whom Our Lord will confess before His Father in heaven; and however the world may oppose you, however it may reproach you, do not blush to own that you are followers of the Gospel, the servants and friends of Christ. Impress deeply upon your mind that to live as a Christian, to profess openly that you are a Christian, is the true way to fashion for yourself golden pinions wherewith to wing your flight to heaven, and shine forever in its glorious light.

SERMON XXXIII.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND TEMPTATION.

THE life of man, while he is a pilgrim here below, is one of continual conflict. Holy Job says: "The life of man upon earth is a warfare." On the one hand, the devil as a roaring lion is ever going about to tempt us to evil, in his cunning making use of everything as a weapon for our destruction; on the other, the flesh, a domestic foe, only too much humored, strives under specious appearances to deter us from good; finally, the world tempts us in a thousand ways, by bad examples, false maxims, mocking sneers, or alluring flatteries, not to speak of threats and persecutions.

Hence no age, no sex, no state of life, however holy or secluded, is exempt from temptation. Nor is this to be wondered at; for if even in the desert our blessed Lord was tempted, we must also be subjected to the same trial; as long as we live we shall be tempted, since the devil carries on against the servants of God the warfare he waged against their divine Master. Consequently, while souls who are slaves to their passions are but slightly assailed—either because God spares their weakness, or because the devil is so sure of the mastery over them that he leaves them alone—those who are earnest in God's service have a severe strife to sustain. Thus we read in Ecclesiasticus: "Son, when thou cometh to the service of God, prepare thy soul for temptation." And the Archangel Raphael said to Tobias: "Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that

temptation should prove thee." All the saints, moreover, were more or less sorely tempted.

It may, therefore, be useful to you if I say a few words upon this subject: it is one of immense importance. Let us inquire what temptation is; how it may be a source of sin; what are the lofty ends for which God permits us to be tempted; and, lastly, the means to be employed in order to withstand temptation and triumph over it.

Temptation is a stimulus whereby our will is incited to sin. It is not, as some timid and anxious souls fear, in itself an evil, still less is it a sin. It is yielding to temptation that is evil and sinful. To understand this truth we must observe that in temptations there are three stages or degrees; firstly, that of suggestion, when the devil, the world, or the flesh incites the soul to sin, suggesting the advantage to be gained by some wrongful act; secondly, that of incipient desire, when the suggestion affords a certain pleasure, although the will still resists it; thirdly, that of consent, when the soul, fascinated by the proposal and the delight of promises, deliberately consents to the deed.

In the first stage no sin is involved, because we are passive, not active agents. Temptation is a terrible enemy which knocks, so to speak, at the door of our heart, endeavoring to force an entrance; but so long as this is denied him, our heart contracts no stain of guilt. The same may be said of the second stage, because it is impossible to avoid a certain pleasurable sensation, just as we cannot help being hurt by a blow. There is no sin so long as the will promptly and resolutely repels the suggestion, and does not acquiesce in it. But if the mind is allowed to dwell upon the gratification it offers, the soul, unable to resist the attraction, will freely and of set purpose consent to the temptation, and fall into sin.

Let me remind you, however, that it is of faith that God never tempts man to sin, though he permits him to

be tempted. "Let no man," thus St. James admonishes the faithful, "when he is tempted say he is tempted of God. For God is not a tempter of evils, and He tempteth no man." And if He allows our three great enemies to war against us continually, it is to accomplish the designs of His infinite wisdom.

Above all, the primary use of temptation is to acquaint us with our own weakness and keep us humble. The soul that has never been tempted does not know its own misery, its inherent frailty, its natural proneness to sin. Hence it will easily be blinded by self-love; and having performed some good works, being animated by a sincere desire to love and serve God, it will deem itself capable of heroic achievements. But when under the assaults of temptation, it learns that without the divine assistance it is liable to fall into the most grievous sins, the heart becomes keenly alive to her own weakness; sentiments of humility are engendered within the breast; the soul is conscious of the need of imploring help from God who alone can give her power to do what is right. Then with the Psalmist she will exclaim: "It is good for me to adhere to my God." See how it was with St. Peter. When Our Lord warned him of his approaching danger, confident in his own strength, he answered: "Though I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee;" even adding that if all the other apostles were scandalized, he alone would remain faithful. The sad result of this temerity, this refusal to be warned, is only too well known.

Thus God, in permitting us to be in constant conflict with our spiritual enemies, teaches us our own nothingness, so that mistrusting our own powers, we may feel our need of Him and our liability to succumb in the hour of temptation if He withdraw His protecting hand.

Furthermore, temptation fortifies the soul in the practice of virtue, as the winds cause the young trees to strike their roots deep into the soil. What is virtue, but doing

what is right easily and willingly. Now this facility and readiness, as a general rule, is only acquired by repeated acts of virtue, and how can we exercise ourselves in virtue unless we are tempted to acts of a contrary nature? How, for instance, can we practise meekness, unless we are provoked to anger? humility, unless assailed by pride and vainglory? submission to the Divine Will, unless we are tried by affliction? Believe me, the virtue which has never sustained a struggle is indeed feeble and unreal. St. Philip Neri says that if God desires a soul to excel in one particular virtue He ordains that she should be subjected to fierce temptation to the opposite sin. Thus it was with Abraham, Joseph, Job, and Tobias. When St. Paul, weary of resisting the temptations of the flesh, besought the Lord that they might cease, his request was refused, and he was told that power was made perfect in infirmity. It is said that for five consecutive years St. Mary Magdalen was harassed by temptations of every imaginable kind—temptation against the faith, temptation against chastity, temptation to despair, temptation to commit every one of the deadly sins, so that she herself said: "There is not a single temptation in hell which I have not experienced." But if God tries these souls by temptation as gold in the crucible or iron in the furnace, how great, how glorious, do they thus become! Yes, my children; undoubtedly, temptation strengthens us in the practice of Christian virtues.

Lastly, temptation is a means of gaining eternal glory. The celestial crown is bright and beautiful, but it must be fashioned by the biting blow of the chisel. Every battle out of which we come victorious adds a jewel to the diadem awaiting us in Paradise. "Blessed," says St. James, "is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been proved, he shall receive a crown of life." And assuredly if the Christian, assailed at every moment and in every circumstance of his life, does not shrink

from the conflict; if, faithful to his God, he does not lay down his arms, but in every struggle proves the victor, he will not fail to attain his reward.

And what a reward that is which is reserved for him! Listen to the description given of it in the Apocalypse: "He that shall overcome in the battle of life, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God. He shall sit with Me upon My throne; I will give him the hidden manna, I will give him to eat of the tree of life that is in the paradise of My God. He shall not be hurt by the second death; he shall be clad in white garments, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life."

Such are the wise ends for which God permits us to be tempted—ends so profitable to the soul, that the saints, far advanced in the spiritual life, not only were not cast down by temptations, but rejoiced in them. St. James, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, says: "Brethren, count it all joy when you shall fall into divers temptations." Wherefore, my children, when temptations overtake you, like a storm threatening to work havoc in your soul, do not lose heart or be alarmed. Our life would certainly be far more peaceful were it not for these temptations. But remember this is the time of war, not of peace, of struggle, not of rest; moreover, "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able." However weak you are and easily overcome, you have only to arm yourself with the weapons Jesus Christ suggests to you, and you will prove invincible in the fight.

The two principal weapons are watchfulness and prayer. "Watch ye, and pray," are Our Lord's words, "that ye enter not into temptation"; or, as St. Jerome expounds the precept, that ye may not be overcome by temptation.

Watchfulness is the first necessity; it consists in being prepared to encounter temptation, prompt in repelling it,

diligent in mortifying the passions. The way to prepare one's self to resist temptation is to trust in Divine Grace, to acknowledge that without His assistance it is impossible for us to overcome. "Without Me," Our Lord says, "you can do nothing." Imitate David in his fight with Goliath; he, a mere stripling, went out unarmed to meet the gigantic Philistine, clad in armor from head to foot. But David trusted in God and not in his own strength. "Thou comest to me," he said to his antagonist, "with a spear and shield; I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts;" and with the first blow he struck him to the ground.

Vigilance is also needed to repel the temptation at once. St. Jerome exhorts Eustachia not to allow evil thoughts to strike root in her mind, but to tear up the cockle the moment it appears. If, my children, when you are assailed by temptation, you temporize and trifle with it, or if your resistance is feeble and half-hearted, the impression will become more vivid, the corrupt desire more keen, your passions will awake, and you will be led to consent to sin by the force of the temptation, which at the outset might easily have been overcome. Thus a tiny spark, if not promptly stamped out, may cause a great conflagration.

The necessity of mortifying our passions compels us to be always on the watch. You all know, perhaps by experience, what formidable enemies the passions are, always urging the flesh to rebel against the spirit. They must be constantly mortified, lest they usurp ascendency over the spirit. The flesh must be subdued, because it ministers to passions and excites them to evil. The penances and austerities enjoined by the Church should at any rate be strictly observed.

But watchfulness is not sufficient, unless accompanied by prayer. "Watch and pray," Our Lord says. And of a truth, actual grace is needed to overcome temptation,

and the means, the only means, whereby it can be obtained is prayer. With the Psalmist we must lift up our eyes to the mountains, from whence help shall come, the help that will enable us to conquer. The fiercer the temptation, the more fervent should be our prayer. The reason why so many yield to temptation is because they neglect prayer; when the tempest comes upon them, they do not, like the apostles, cry out: "Lord, save us, we perish." Pray earnestly, and you will be victorious; cease to pray, and the temptation will gain the mastery over you.

Watchfulness and prayer are, then, the two weapons which you must ever employ and never lay down if you are intent upon overcoming temptation. Remember that God is on your side, He will not forsake you in the spiritual combat; to the soul that is brave and that perseveres, He gives joy and consolation here below, a foretaste of the bliss to come, when she will be crowned with light in the eternal glory of heaven.

SERMON XXXIV.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND CROSSES.

To begin life with tears, to pass it in tears, to end it with tears, such, my children, is the lot of man upon earth. Pain stands by our cradle, dogs our steps in childhood, mixes bitterness in youth's cup of joy, and does not desert the close of a life which God intended to be happy, but which is, in consequence of sin, beset with crosses and afflictions. It is on this account that holy Job said, and said truly, that man's life, though lasting but a short time, is filled with many miseries.

There is, in fact, no age, no state of life, no position exempt from the cross. Whether it be slander or persecution, sickness or poverty, misfortune or humiliations; whether it be the loss of those dear to us, the loss of property, the loss of reputation—whatever the cross may be, none can escape it. Sooner or later, more or less heavily, it must fall upon every one. You, who in the spring-tide of life, looking forward to the future, picture it to yourselves, perhaps, as a long vista of unclouded enjoyment, be not deceived; the cross awaits you also; it is a tree indigenous to every clime, on every roof its shadow falls.

Since, therefore, in this world all are under the necessity of bearing the cross, no alternative remains but to sanctify the cross by accepting it with Christian resignation. To those who receive it from the hand of God it becomes a source of celestial benediction; it produces in them the resemblance to Jesus Christ, which is indispensable for admission to the number of the elect, and at

last it opens to them the gates of heaven, as I intend to demonstrate in our conference to-day.

"If any man will come after me," Our Lord says in the Gospel, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." From these words it is impossible to do otherwise than conclude that here below we have little else to expect but sorrows, trials, and afflictions of every kind. This is what is meant when this world is spoken of as a valley of tears, a land of exile.

If suffering is the inevitable lot of all the sons of Adam, there is no doubt that the Christian who desires to follow Christ more nearly must expect greater crosses as his portion than those of other men. St. Paul, who had suffered many things at Antioch, Iconia, Lystra, and indeed in all countries whither he went, was anxious to impress upon his converts that this was nothing peculiar to himself, but the common destiny of all who desired to follow in the footsteps of the Redeemer. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." God loves to draw to Himself those souls who are acceptable in His sight, and this He does by detaching them from earthly things by means of crosses. The cross was ever before the mind and within the heart of Jesus; and since love desires in the beloved similarity of tastes, of thought, of aspirations, it is by crosses and sufferings that He distinguishes those who are dear to Him. "Look closely," He one day said to St. Teresa, "at those who were nearest to Me, most beloved by Me, and thou wilt see that they were most tried by affliction." And to another saint He said: "It is to My friends that I give to drink of the chalice of My Passion."

Thus, it has always been. Who was more just than Abel, more obedient than Isaac, more docile than Jacob, more chaste than Joseph, more God-fearing than Tobias? And who had more crosses and tribulations than those patriarchs? David was the man after God's heart, and

what troubles he had, both in his kingdom and in his own family! St. John Baptist was declared by Our Lord to be the greatest of saints, yet he was imprisoned and beheaded to please an impudent dancing-girl. The apostles in their work of evangelization encountered terrible crosses. The confessors and virgins of the early Church were subjected to cruel tortures and death for following the faith of Christ. No created being was beloved by God as much as our blessed Lady, yet what was her life but an unbroken series of trials and of sacrifices, which culminated upon Calvary when she beheld her Son expiring upon the cross between two malefactors, an object of mockery and insult to the multitude. Well, indeed, did she merit the title given her by the Church of Queen of martyrs.

Marvel not then, my children, if Our Lord places to the lips of loving but timorous souls the chalice of affliction, and allots to them at least a few drops of the ocean of sufferings in which He closed His mortal life. Think it not strange that He requires His true disciples to be nailed to His cross, crucified for love of Him; we do not find delicate members of a head crowned with thorns.

Wherefore, knowing as you do that it is God's will that you should suffer with Christ and be crucified with Him, and that He it is who sends these crosses upon you, accept them submissively, kiss the hand that scourges you. He is your Creator and your Lord, the absolute disposer of all things; you are His creatures, bound to submit unreservedly to His good pleasure. Moreover, to profess to love Our Lord and to hate and reject the cross is to repudiate Christ Himself. Then, alone, can you truly say you love Him, when, if visited by poverty, contempt, calumny, spiritual desolation, or physical infirmities, you unite your sufferings to His; and clinging to the cross, you cease not to laud and magnify His holy name, and to serve Him with all fidelity. Thus

you will give clear proof that your love is strong, generous, perfect; you will be able to say to Him with holy confidence: "My God, I love Thee." And even before you give utterance to your feelings, He will have understood the language of your heart, He will have accepted your homage; the cross borne with patience and resignation will have pleaded eloquently in your behalf.

Thus all the saints have felt and acted; they thirsted for the cross with a longing so ardent that it seemed almost exaggerated, almost foolish in its intensity. Listen to the words of St. Paul: "I please myself in my infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ." We know the oft-repeated saying of St. Teresa, "To suffer or to die." St. Ignatius of Loyola, when cast into prison at Salamanca and loaded with chains as a malefactor, rejoiced exceedingly, as if he were the happiest man in the world. And St. John of the Cross, when asked by Our Lord what reward he desired for all he had done and endured for His name's sake, replied: "Lord, that I may suffer and be despised for Thee."

Those, then, who are truly happy are not the great and prosperous, whose life is garlanded with flowers, but the lowly and afflicted, whom God calls to walk in the thorny way of the cross; provided always that in all their trials they recognize the loving hand of Providence, and bear their burden uncomplainingly, saying with Job: "As it hath pleased the Lord, so is it done."

Besides, did we know the great profit to be derived from the cross, we should carry it with Christian fortitude. First of all, it is a means of acquiring great merit. Every act of resignation and of patience is recorded as a merit; the soul that is tried by tribulations has the opportunity of laying up in a short time a vast treasure in heaven. We do not deny, far from it, that good works may be performed in prosperity. But how easily imper-

fections creep in when all is in accordance with one's desires! How prone one is to act from self-love, not from the love of God! Whereas in time of affliction, when nature finds no gratification to suffer in conformity with the divine will, and to continue to do good although with difficulty, cannot be otherwise than pleasing to God, and a source of merit to one's self. St. James declares that by suffering in patience the summit of Christian virtue is attained: "Patience hath a perfect work." How foolish, then, are those who by impatience and complaining lose the precious merits that the cross would gain for them!

Furthermore, the cross detaches the heart from earthly things, the love of which is fatal to the soul, and implants in it the love of virtue. In the time of affliction we lose all taste for the pleasures and vanities of the world, even if we loved them before. Finding no satisfaction or consolation in them, we naturally lift our thoughts to God, and seek the joys that are above. It is by the cross that saints are formed; there is not one among the glorious company of the blessed who was sanctified otherwise than by following in the steps of Christ crucified. It is by the cross that God purifies and refines the just; just as the sculptor with many a hard blow of his graving-tool fashions out of the rough block of marble a fair and shapely statue.

It is not enough that you should not regard the cross as the world does, as a misery and misfortune; you should view it in its true light—as a blessing, a sign of God's favor, praying Him to implant within your heart a steadfast and generous love of it. Do not shrink from its weight; God proportions the burden to the strength of him on whom it is laid, and He will give the power needed to bear it.

Finally, the cross is a ladder whereby we mount up to heaven, a key that unlocks its portals. St. John, in his

visions of the heavenly Jerusalem, saw a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne of God, clad in white robes, with palms in their hands, and was told that the glorious and triumphant company were they who had come out of great tribulation. They had suffered and shed tears; but their tribulations, borne in patience, had merited for them joy and victory. The Apostle Paul says that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God. And Our Lord bids His disciples be glad and rejoice when persecuted and calumniated, for thus their reward would be very great in heaven.

Yes, this exile will soon be ended, and you will enter your celestial home, where all vexation, labor, and sorrow will cease; where the tears shed here below at the foot of the cross will be converted into precious jewels to enrich the crown that will adorn your brow.

Wherefore, my children, you who love God and desire to be His obedient servants, submit promptly and cheerfully to the crosses He may lay upon you. Bow before His adorable will without a word, without a sigh. Remember that Jesus suffered, who was the unviolated sanctity of God; that Mary suffered, who was the most innocent of creatures, the most beloved of God; that all the saints suffered; that the cross will be your portion as long as you are in this earthly tabernacle.

Be patient, then, not only under great afflictions but in the minor crosses and contradictions you meet with day by day. Be patient in bearing with others; be patient when your will or your wishes are thwarted; be patient, in a word, at all times and under all circumstances. Remember that God sends the cross to those whom He loves, to detach them from earth and make them long for heaven; that the cross is the mark upon the foreheads of the elect; that it is the key of eternal happiness, a blessing I wish you all from the bottom of my heart.

SERMON XXXV.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND MORTIFICATION.

It is possible that you may have observed, in the early part of the year, the care and attention which the vine-dresser bestows on his vineyard or his vinery. He cuts away from the root the useless off-shoots; he prunes the branches, cutting off some entirely down to the stem, while of others he either lops off a considerable portion, or merely takes off the end to check its growth. When this is done, the unhappy vine looks so bare and miserable, that any one who was unacquainted with the beneficial effects resulting from the use of the pruning-knife, seeing how unsparingly it had been at work, might accuse the ruthless vine-dresser of ignorance and folly. Yet, as you know, woe to him who does otherwise! If the superfluous branches be left uncut and untrimmed, although the vine may be of the choicest kind, planted in rich soil, occupying the most favorable position, it will produce nothing but a wealth of showy leaves and long tendrils, without a single bunch of grapes.

There is a virtue, my children, on which you ought to expend as much attention as the careful vine-dresser does on studying the culture of the vine; a virtue calculated to produce upon the soul the same effect as the use of the pruning-knife does upon the vine; a virtue which checks and regulates the impulses and passions in order that they may tend to good and not to evil, just as the fertility of the vine is checked and regulated by pruning and cutting away the sterile branches which only draw away the nourishment from the stock. This virtue as,

you will already have guessed, is mortification. It is a virtue repugnant to our corrupt nature, but most useful for its right guidance; a virtue apparently harsh and severe, but highly prized by those who cultivate it.

I intend to-day to set before you the necessity of mortification, and the different ways of practising it. I shall doubtless say much which you already know, but nevertheless I must ask you to listen to me attentively.

When Adam sinned, man lost his original innocence, his intellect was darkened, his will was enfeebled, and the flesh, rebelling against the spirit, became his most terrible enemy, powerfully inciting him to deeds of ill. Hence the necessity of mortification in order to restrain and correct our revolted nature. By mortification I do not, however, mean those austerities which are enjoined by the Church, such as fasting and abstinence on certain days, because to omit these without legitimate reason is a sin; I refer to voluntary mortifications, which we are not bound to perform, but which are most useful and may even be called necessary—necessary alike to the innocent and the penitent; to the former, lest he should lose his innocence, to the latter, in order that he may persevere in grace.

Innocence is, indeed, my dear children, a beauteous flower in which God takes delight, and blessed are they who possess it. But this blossom of Paradise cannot be preserved intact upon this earth, where everything conspires to destroy it, unless it be guarded by a hedge of thorns. Bad books, bad newspapers, display in dress, luxurious habits, evil example, license in conversation, covert allusions, and open dissoluteness are so many snares to entrap the innocent. Besides these external facts there are other and more insidious enemies within —the evil suggestions of the imagination, the corrupt inclinations of the heart, the fatal allurements of the senses; so that if it is guarded on one side, it is assailed upon the

other, like a rare and exquisite plant, that every passer-by endeavors to gather for himself. "Where," exclaims St. Leo, "is innocence not in danger?" It is imperilled equally by the abundance of wealth and the straits of poverty, for the one engenders pride, the other inclines to murmuring and impatience. It is imperilled by health as well as by sickness, since the former encourages devotion to pleasure, the latter is apt to produce gloom and melancholy. It is imperilled by human respect, by the customs of society; in every place, under all circumstances.

And in the midst of all these dangers, in the face of so many adversaries, innocence has no weapon of defence except mortification. The enemy most to be dreaded is concupiscence, by which, as St. James says, every man is drawn away and allured. But the seductions of external objects have no power when the eye is trained by mortification to disregard them; the riches, the good things of the world cease to attract the heart that is schooled by mortification not to lust after them. This is why all the souls, without exception, who preserve their innocence are careful to mortify their rebel nature, to crucify the flesh by means of fasts, vigils, austerities, and cruel and prolonged penances at which the angels themselves could not but look in admiring wonder.

And since innocence is a treasure contained in a vessel so fragile, it behooves those who would preserve it unharmed to guard it by great watchfulness over words and looks and actions, by restraint of the heart and of the senses, by continual, ungrudging mortification of the flesh with its concupiscences.

For those who, having lost the spotless robe of innocence, wear the garb of the penitent, mortification is yet more indispensable, in order to make satisfaction for sins that are past, and avoid relapse in the future.

Last of all, mortification is necessary to satisfy the Divine Justice. We know that if the sinner makes con-

fession with the right disposition, he obtains pardon; that is to say, the guilt of sin is removed, but the penalty is not remitted; it must be paid either in this world or in the world to come. "No sin," St. Augustine says, "whether it be great or small, can pass unpunished; it must be expiated either by mortification on the part of the sinner during his lifetime, or by the judgments of God after death."

Now, if you consider that you have offended God not once only, but times innumerable; that the debt you owe Him is no slight one, will you not gladly embrace mortification, and chastise your body, which was the instrument of your sin? It was this thought that induced the penitents of old to perform penances of a rigor unheard of in the present day—to walk barefoot, to wear sackcloth, to undertake toilsome pilgrimages to distant shrines to scourge themselves till the blood flowed freely, to withdraw to dark and noisome caves, there to spend the remainder of their days in solitude and silence, in fasting and tears, dead to the world and dead to themselves. It was this thought that led St. Paula, a Roman lady of high rank, to practise mortifications that appear almost excessive—to sleep on the bare ground, to wear a hair shirt, to spend her days in prayer and weeping—to atone for the vanities and self-indulgence of her early life, just as if she had been a grievous sinner.

But not only do past sins render mortification necessary, it is requisite as a safeguard against the danger of relapse. As long as we live here below, we are weak reeds blown about by every blast; we have within us the law of sin, instigating us to evil; we have the devil, always seeking to gain the mastery over us; we have the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, the pride of life in the world around us; and even after the most hearty resolutions of amendment, our will is by force of habit so inclined to sin that, unless we are vigilant, un-

less we mortify ourselves even in what is permitted, one or other of our adversaries will prevail against us. Sin is a plant of hateful growth; it always leaves within the soul its bitter root, which, unless destroyed by mortification, will throw out vigorous offshoots, and again bear deadly fruit. How is it that we see so many approach the sacraments, make promise of amendment, and then fall back into their old sins? It is not because they were wanting in the proper dispositions, but because they forgot how strong the habit of sin was within them, how unsubdued their rebel nature, and, trusting to their good intentions, they neglected to fortify and defend themselves by mortification, and consequently fell a prey to their spiritual enemies.

And now let us inquire in what manner mortification is to be practised.

St. Francis of Sales tells us that in the first place we must profit by the mortifications God lays upon us—poverty, sickness, temporal misfortunes, contradictions, humiliations, unkind words, all the crosses which meet us daily. Let us receive them as coming from God, saying with the patient Job: "If we have received good things at the hand of God, why should we not receive evil?" For, as St. Aloysius used to say, the penances sent by heaven are the best; because if we practise the mortification we choose for ourselves, and reject all others, we serve God according to our own will, not according to His, and this is diametrically opposed to the spirit of mortification.

In the second place, we should in general prefer interior mortification—that of the spirit before that of the body—either because it goes more to the root of the evil, or because it is less liable to be spoiled by vanity or hypocrisy. We should mortify our thoughts, not only those that are sinful, but those that are without profit either to the glory of God or our own sanctification. We should

mortify our will, subjugating it to the will of God and that of our superiors; denying ourselves trifling gratifications, even the most innocent—the satisfaction of harmless curiosity, the desire of hearing and telling news. How many of these little acts may be made in the course of the day! Slight as they undeniably are, they are most beneficial to the soul.

Thirdly, there are corporal mortifications—abstinences, fasts, vigils—which, though inferior to spiritual mortification, are yet enjoined on us by Our Lord by teaching, and by example. Let us mortify our appetite both as to the quantity and the quality of our food, especially in regard to wine; and, not content with keeping strictly the fasts of obligation, let us add to them some of our devotion. Let us mortify ourselves in the matter of sleep, only taking as much as we require; of mortification of the eyes and of the tongue I shall speak in another conference.

Let mortification then be your watchword, and do not imagine, as the world avers, that it is a severe and depressing virtue. No; the soul that is mortified finds peace and joy here below, because, contenting herself with little, her heart is at rest, and even if mortification is repugnant to nature, if it requires you to do violence to yourself and to sacrifice yourself, your efforts will be rewarded with abundant joy. Look at the cross, recall the life of Christ, which was one long mortification, and you will find it sweet to drink of the chalice He drank of so deeply. And thus bearing, as St. Paul says, the marks of the Lord Jesus on your body and in your heart, while you will not be destitute of true happiness in this life, you will earn the everlasting bliss of heaven; for the Psalmist declares that they that sow in tears shall reap in joy, and gather in with jubilation sheaves rich with the choicest grain.

SERMON XXXVI.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND MODESTY.

YOUTH is the most important period of life, the season of preparation; happy those who, while the heart is impressionable and the spirits buoyant, make it their object to embellish their soul with the fairest virtues, with true piety, purity, and chastity. The Scripture says: "Blessed is the man who hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners. He shall be like a tree which is planted near the running waters, which shall bring forth its fruits in due season."

Youth is, however, exposed to many dangers; society is corrupt in the present day; evil example is rife, and a thousand vanities entice the inexperienced traveller on life's highway. There is one virtue specially calculated to preserve the innocence of the virgin heart—a virtue which, like a quickset hedge, is designed to hold the enemy aloof. This virtue is modesty. It is one which belongs of right to the Christian maiden, and is a greater ornament to her than rich apparel, gold, and gems. If, my children, you desire to keep your heart free from contamination, cultivate the virtue of modesty, the value of which I now propose to set before you.

Modesty is exhibited in a composed and sedate demeanor; it regulates the exterior bearing and actions so that in our deportment there may be nothing at which exception can be taken, nothing deserving of censure or rebuke, nothing contrary to our Christian profession. Modesty is practised by custody of the eyes and of the tongue, by quiet dress and unassuming manners.

Let us first speak of modesty in regard to the eyes. Daily experience teaches us that the unruly thoughts and affections, which wage fierce and constant war against the spirit, are for the most part due to lack of custody of the eyes. There exists between the perception of the senses and the intellect, between the intellect and the will and the affections, so close a connection, that a judgment is instantly formed upon the object perceived by the eyes, and it is either desired or abhorred by the affections. Hence an object that is good will evoke good thoughts and a wholesome satisfaction; whereas an evil object will awaken bad thoughts and guilty pleasures. Thus, the eyes may be called the portals of the soul with greater justice than the other senses, because through the eyes distraction and dissipation invade the heart; it is through the eyes principally that admission is given to vain imaginations, seductive images which arouse reprehensible thoughts, ideas of evil, and inspire desires. "Gaze not about upon another's beauty," says the Wise Man, "for many have perished by the beauty of a woman, and thereby lust is enkindled as a fire." "The first arrows," says St. Alphonsus, "that wound the chaste soul, and wound it perhaps mortally, find entrance through the eyes; one look may be like a spark of hell-fire, that will prove its destruction." In how many cases has license of the eyes been the means of corrupting the purity of the heart, disturbing the serenity of the soul, causing fervor to grow cold, eventuating finally in perdition! Dina, Jacob's daughter, was a good and irreproachable young woman until one day, in spite of her father's prohibition, she went out from the tents with no thought of harm to see the women of the country. She saw and was seen, and had bitter cause to rue the indulgence of her curiosity.

Many unhappy maidens, white as snow in regard to their virginal purity, have, in like manner, lost that trea-

sure through one unguarded glance. The poison of immodesty has entered by the eyes—eyes once laughing and joyous in their innocence, now weeping over their lost virtue.

For this reason all the saints observed custody of the eyes with jealous care. St. Bernard, after having been a year in the novitiate, was unable to say whether the roof of his cell was ceiled or vaulted; St. Peter of Alcantara kept his eyes cast down so habitually, that he only knew of his fellow-monks by their voices when conversing with them; St. Aloysius is said to have scarcely ever looked his own mother in the face, and after living for two years in the court at Madrid, as one of the Empress' pages, the angelic youth failed to recognize his royal mistress when he happened to meet her beyond the precincts of the palace. These servants of God were well aware that upon custody of the eyes depends custody of the heart, and that in order to keep their mind fixed upon God, it was indispensable to avoid every occasion of danger that might arise from the sense of sight.

Wherefore, my children, keep your eyes under the guardianship of modesty. Remember that the devil never sleeps: he knows only too well how to avail himself of feminine failings, of the sensitiveness of a woman's nature, of everything that will aid him in his work of destroying souls. Knowing that curiosity is a weakness common to the daughters of Eve, that their eyes naturally turn wherever there is anything fair to behold, he lays snares along their path to induce them to look, to gaze upon objects that are undesirable or suggestive of what is evil, in order that impure desires being awakened within the breast, the passions may be kindled, and the death of the soul become merely a question of time.

And if the Christian maiden is to observe custody of the eyes at home, when walking in the streets, and

in the company of others, still more should she be mindful to do so in church. The church is the house of prayer, the dwelling-place upon earth of the thrice-holy God, before whom cherubim and seraphim fall in lowly adoration. Mortals ought not to enter His presence without feelings of holy awe. Beware of letting your eyes wander there, where all breathes recollection and sanctity. Beware lest you fall into the objectionable habit of looking at every one who comes in or goes out, of observing her dress or her carriage. Your demeanor should be modest, in keeping with the holy fear wherewith the sacredness of the place should inspire you; your eyes cast down, or fixed upon your prayer-book, or upon the altar where the divine mysteries are celebrated, or on the preacher should you be listening to a sermon. Irreverence in the house of God is reprehensible in every Christian, but doubly so in a Child of Mary, who, in custody of the eyes, ought to be an edifying example to all beholders.

Leaving modesty in speech and conversation for the subject of our next conference, I pass on to speak of modesty in dress. Vanity and love of dress are directly opposed to that modesty which forms the fairest ornament of a woman, which, like a thin veil, does but enhance, not conceal, her charms. St. Paul, writing to Timothy, does not think it inconsistent with his apostolical dignity to enter into details respecting feminine attire: "Let women," he says, "adorn themselves with modesty and sobriety, not with plaited hair or gold, or pearls, or costly apparel, but as it becometh women professing godliness, with good works." The Fathers of the Church say the same; listen to St. John Chrysostom: "From adorning the person extravagantly innumerable evils arise: arrogance of demeanor, pride of heart, contempt of one's neighbor, frivolity, the desire of forbidden pleasures." And Tertullian says: "Magnificent garments, splendid ornaments are an invention of the devil; he in-

spires women with the love of them to the prejudice and even the ruin of their souls."

But you are Christians, and the Christian maiden should remember that her body is holy, that it was cleansed in the laver of Baptism and made the temple of the Holy Ghost, that it has again and again been nourished with the flesh of the immaculate Son of God, that it is destined to rise again one day glorious and immortal. And while we behold the sacred body of the Redeemer bathed in blood, torn with scourges, and lacerated with thorns, will you strive to adorn your body according to all the foolish and ever-changing fashions of the world? Will you, who call yourselves the daughters of the Blessed Virgin, who was the model of all virtues and pre-eminently of holy modesty, outrage this virtue, so dear to her heart, by giving a great portion of your time and thoughts to the adornment of your person? I do not wish you to make yourselves singular, to abjure every kind of ornament: this your religion does not demand of you; it requires you to dress according to your state and condition in life, with simplicity, but in the manner that becomes the class of society in which you move. What you are to avoid is ostentation and display, the affecting of the extremes of the fashion, and studying to be remarked upon rather for the elegance of your dress than for its suitability.

Let modesty and decorum, therefore, be your rule in the adornment of your person. It is necessary, to a certain extent, to conform to the customs of the world in which we live. You cannot wholly set them at defiance, but you need not be enslaved by them, nor let it be said of you that so poor a thing as the dress you wear engrosses your thoughts and your affections.

Lastly, be modest in your deportment, your manner, your gestures, your every action. Would that you knew what dignity, what grace a grave and retiring bearing

adds to a young woman. What dangers she will escape, what respect she will win, if she is quiet and composed in appearance, unassuming in conversation, gentle and reserved in her behavior, humble, affectionate, and modest in her intercourse with others!

Cultivate to the utmost this precious virtue, the one for which our blessed Lady showed her predilection. Never let your eyes rest on any seductive or objectionable object; close your ears to conversation that would bring a blush to your cheek; let your speech be edifying and calculated to inspire others with the love of virtue. St. Paul exhorts us: "Let your modesty be known to all men," in order that, appreciating and admiring it in you, they may be led to practise it. Be modest everywhere and with every one; you will thus resemble the angels and be one day admitted to their blessed company.

SERMON XXXVII.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND CUSTODY OF THE TONGUE.

AMONG all the gifts which God has bestowed upon His rational creatures, the gift of speech is doubtless the best and chiefest; it is a gift of such value to man that it alone would testify abundantly to the divine bounty in our regard. It is by the tongue that we hold our place in the family, in society; by it we make known our wants; by it we carry on with our fellow-men that mutual exchange of thought and feelings which lends to life its greatest charm; by it, in fact, the ignorant are instructed, the afflicted are consoled, counsel is given to those who need it, virtue is praised and vice censured.

But as in this wicked world noblest things find vilest using, sad abuse is unhappily made of the tongue. If it were employed, as it ought to be, to the glory of God, it would be productive of immense benefits and blessings; whereas too often it becomes instrumental in effecting the soul's perdition. From this abuse of the gift of speech young women are by no means exempt; indeed, one of the principal failings laid to their charge is that they make too free use of their tongue. Thus, many who would otherwise be not only good, but exemplary, through want of caution in speech offend against truth, charity, justice, and good manners; not to speak of more flagrant transgressions.

Most probably there are some among you, my children, who are accustomed to give too free rein to your tongue. Before you become confirmed in this bad habit listen to the means of overcoming it which I am about

to suggest to you, practise them diligently, and you will have done much towards assuring the salvation of your soul.

Although the end for which God gave us the gift of speech was that we should praise Him and give thanks to Him, and thus do on earth what the angels continually do in heaven, there is no doubt that no member of the human body is so dangerous as the tongue. St. James expresses himself very forcibly on this subject: "The tongue defileth the whole body, being set on fire by hell; it is an unquiet evil; a world of iniquity; full of deadly poison."

It would be impossible to enumerate all the different ways by which we may sin by the tongue. I will not mention the abuse made of it by those who, Christians only in name, blaspheme the holy name of God, question or deny the teaching of the Church, cast discredit on her ministers, calumniate or stir up discord among their fellow-men. You, whom I am addressing, my dear Children of Mary, ought to set a good example to others. But is not your manner of speaking of sacred things and holy persons sometimes wanting in respect; do you not sometimes in conversation use lightly that august name which the angels utter with bowed head; do you never pass judgment upon matters of which you know little? And in regard to the association whereof you are members, do you never censure your superiors, criticise their commands, accuse them of partiality, impugn their authority, so as to lessen the respect felt for them and diminish the good that might be done by their efforts for the glory of God?

Many, besides, are the sins of the tongue you commit against your neighbor, not indeed by calumny, for I do not believe that any of you would impute to others faults of which they were not guilty, but by detraction, by insinuations of an unfavorable nature, by ridicule,

by impatient or angry answers, by contemptuous or boastful words. If you think that I exaggerate, look into your own conscience, and see how many sins of the tongue it will accuse you of! They form the greater part of the sins you habitually commit, of which you accuse yourself in confession. In fact, could you learn to be circumspect in speech in you would be verified the words of St. James: "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man."

Now, let us inquire what are the means of attaining this perfection. The first is prayer; daily to ask of God the grace to mortify and bridle your tongue, saying, with David: "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and a door round about my lips, that I sin not with my tongue." We are told in Scripture that if any man thinks himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is vain. Again, we are told that the tongue, although it be but a small member, and imprisoned within the lips, is so unruly that no man can tame it by his own unaided power. Hence, as St. Augustine remarks, we see the absolute necessity of having recourse to God in prayer, in order to obtain of Him grace to restrain and subdue the tongue, for to do so in our own strength is impossible. You may, it is true, by assiduous and untiring watchfulness over yourself, correct evil habits, triumph over faults and failings, and lead a Christian life; but completely to subjugate the tongue is a more difficult matter, as it requires all the force of the will, united to earnest, unceasing prayer. St. James compares the tongue to fire. Now fire is indispensable to man's existence, but how terrible are the conflagrations, the disasters it causes, the havoc it works, unless it be most carefully watched and kept within bounds. In like manner, if you desire that this member—small indeed in itself, but capable of effecting calamitous results—may not prove the ruin of your soul, raise your heart to God, especially on first

awaking and when you have occasion to speak, imploring Him to effect, by the aid of His omnipotent grace, that which is beyond human power: to grant that you may go through the day without a word passing your lips which is not consonant with justice and charity. It is recorded of St. Aloysius that before speaking he was accustomed to recollect himself and breathe the prayer: "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth." St. Teresa also made it a rule to commend to God what she was about to say before entering into conversation with any one, in order that she might not utter a word displeasing to Him.

The second means of curbing the tongue is not to speak much. Unquestionably the habit of chattering about every one and everything is a bad and a foolish one, since, as Holy Scripture says: "In the multitude of words there shall not want sin." In young women it is especially reprehensible, for as they are inexperienced and often ill-informed about the matter of which they speak, it would become them better to listen than to talk. "Speak, thou that art older," says the Wise Man, "for it becometh thee to speak the first word with careful knowledge. . . .Young man, scarcely speak in thine own cause; in many things be as if thou wert ignorant, and hear in silence." Happy, indeed, are those who know how to keep silence, to refrain from telling whatever merely gratifies their self-love, to abstain from retorting when they are abused or wrongfully blamed. This is the great secret of speaking well and wisely: to know when to keep silence; for he who is profuse with his words, speaks without premeditation, and consequently without judgment and wisdom.

But while I would warn you against speaking too much and too hastily, the opposite error of not speaking when occasion requires is also to be avoided. "A time to keep silence, and a time to speak," we read in Holy

Scripture. "The tongue," St. Gregory says, "has to be held in check with discretion, not forbidden all exercise; for it is no less blameworthy to be silent when we ought to speak, than to speak when we ought to be silent."

This truth applies to all of you, my children. If you are wise, if you are true daughters of Mary, imitate our blessed Lady, who, all pure and holy as she was, is said to have been from her very infancy chary of speech, exercising strict custody of the tongue. We only find recorded in Holy Scripture seven sentences spoken by her during the course of her life. This is to teach her children the reserve they ought to practise in their words whether at home or abroad, in the company of their superiors or their equals, at all times and in all places.

The last means to be employed is to reflect on what we are going to say. Nature herself teaches us the necessity of circumspection in our words by placing the tongue under a double guard—the teeth and the lips—while she leaves the ears uncovered. "Let every man," says St. James, "be swift to hear, slow to speak." The Fathers lay great stress upon the vigilance to be observed in speaking. St. Augustine says our words ought to be measured by the rule of reason before they pass our lips; and St. Ambrose, commenting on the Psalmist's words: "I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue," observes that as one who has to ford a dangerous river does not precipitate himself into the water, but proceeds cautiously, feeling his way, so if you have to speak on any subject on which there is danger of speaking too strongly, do not enter upon it without deliberation and forethought.

Would that you knew all the harm that may be done by an inconsiderate speech! You have seen how, if a stone is thrown into a lake, the disturbance on the surface of the water extends in ever-widening circles; and a word spoken thoughtlessly—it may be a disparaging re-

mark about some person—will, perhaps, pass from mouth to mouth, with additions and exaggerations, and produce consequences that are irreparable.

Beware, then, lest you be among those unwise and imprudent individuals who pour out of their lips all that comes into their mind, regardless of time, of place, of person. Resolve not to speak without reflection, to consider what it is opportune to say, and what to leave unsaid. Be fervent in prayer, sparing of your words, watchful over your tongue. To do this will, perchance, cost you no slight effort, no small sacrifice, but you will thereby succeed in bridling your tongue; you will avoid idle and indiscreet words, and, far from offending against charity, truth, good-feeling, and religion, your conversation will tend to the glory of God and the edification of your neighbor. You will, moreover, merit to be numbered among those happy souls whom the Holy Spirit declares to be perfect because they offend not with the tongue.

SERMON XXXVIII.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

ONE of the most precious, most admirable truths taught us in our infancy is that of the presence of God. God is in heaven; He is on earth; He is in every place; He is continually present with us; His eye is ever upon us.

What a consoling thought for us, my dear children, that whithersoever we turn, God is always with us. Not only is He in the heaven above, where His beatific vision is the joy of the blessed; not only is He here below in the sacred tabernacle, hidden under the lowly appearance of bread, to be the spiritual food of the faithful; He is always with us, at our very side. He is with us at our uprising, calling upon us to dedicate to Him our first thought, the first fruits of the opening day; He is with us at our work, helping us by His grace to sanctify our labors; He is with us at our going out and coming in, and when we take our rest He is with us, watching over us with all a mother's care. There is no spot, however secluded, where we can hide from His sight; there is no thought of our heart that He does not read, no action that we perform with which He is not acquainted. "Whither," David asks, "shall I go from Thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from Thy face? If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there; if I descend into hell, Thou art present. If I take my wings early in the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there also shall Thy right hand hold me." If God thus pervades the whole universe with His presence, if He is ever near,

beholding our every thought, our every desire, our every act, ought not this to render us most careful never to offend against His divine majesty, most anxious to please Him in all we do and say? You see, then, how the consciousness of walking continually in God's presence helps the Christian. It helps him wonderfully to avoid sin, to practise virtue, and to maintain a loving union with his Creator.

To walk in the presence of God consists in this: to recall from time to time the fact that He sees and hears us, that at all times and in all places He is near us; and to make it our habit to raise our heart to Him frequently with fervent aspirations. Nothing is more efficacious than this to preserve us from sin. Experience proves that no one, however hardened in crime, would dare to perform an evil action in the presence of any one who stands towards him in a position of superiority. The child will not do wrong when its parent is by, the servant will not disobey in the presence of his master, and the wife takes care how she behaves while her husband's eye is upon her.

And if in the case of every rational creature the presence of one who inspires respect acts as a deterrent from sin, what effect ought the remembrance of God to have upon the Christian, of God, his Father, his Sovereign, who sees the most secret thoughts of his heart? That temptation must indeed be a strong one which prevails against the thought that we stand before God, our Judge, who might immediately visit us with condign punishment, and who will certainly one day call us to account for our every action. How, we say to ourselves, can I offend in the very presence of so great a God, to whom I owe the lowliest reverence; of so good a God, who is deserving of my deepest affection; of so exalted a Ruler, to whom my unquestioning obedience is due?

The Fathers of the Church are unanimous in asserting

the efficacy of this remembrance of God's presence as a safeguard from sin. St. Augustine exclaims: "When, O Lord, I consider attentively that Thou dost continually observe and watch over me by day and by night, with the same care as if there were no other creature besides myself subject to Thee; when I consider that all my thoughts and desires are clear and open to Thy sight, a sense of fear and of confusion comes over me." St. Ephrem says the mere recollection of God's presence is sufficient to cool the most inflamed passions, and keep the soul from defilement. And we know that the holy Abbot Paphnutius induced Thaïs the courtesan to abandon her sinful life by representing to her that the all-seeing eye of God was ever upon her.

This practice of walking in the presence of God is no less useful as a stimulus to Christian virtue. In order to animate Abraham to pursue the thorny path of perfection, the Lord said to him: "I am the Almighty God: walk before Me and be perfect." This was all God enjoined upon him, and all that he did; no more was needed to make of him the friend of God and the father of many nations.

There is, in fact, no more potent incentive to urge us to correspond with grace, to regulate every word and every deed in accordance with the will of God, than this thought: Thou, God, seest me. If the presence of some one in authority is enough to make the young and thoughtless conduct themselves in an exemplary manner, how much more ought the consciousness of the presence of God, to whom the darkness and the light are alike, to have a similar effect upon us? Keep this thought always before your mind, and you will become more and more firmly resolved to perform your duties well and faithfully, to act uprightly, to keep yourself modest and pure, to be regular in your religious exercises, to be most careful in avoiding occasions of sin, to crush self-love, the deadly foe of

virtue; in a word, to run in the way of holiness with ever-increasing ardor.

And if in this sublime path you encounter obstacles and hindrances, if you have to conquer human respect, to overcome the repugnances of nature, to bear persecution from others, the thought that God is with you, that He sees you, will encourage you to surmount all, to endure all. You will say with David: "The Lord is at my right hand, that I be not moved." He is with me, as a valiant warrior to protect me; my enemies shall be put to flight, they will have no strength against me, they shall be put to confusion. Thus the victory, my children, shall be on your side; and you will experience the truth of the words of St. Laurence Justinian, when he says that he considers no means so efficacious to enable the Christian to scale speedily the heights of perfection as the thought that the eye of God is continually upon him.

Moreover, as I said at the commencement, the practice of walking continually in God's sight binds the soul to Him in so close, so firm a union that it is not interrupted by the pursuit of our daily avocations. Whether we work at home, walk out, or converse with others, our thoughts, our affections are with Him. When once the thought of His presence has taken complete possession of your mind you will remain united to Him whatever your occupations may be; there will be no need to lay aside your work, to isolate yourself from your family, to utter a single word, for each pulsation of your heart, every thought of your mind will be directed to Him. To Him you will offer the perpetual incense of prayer, of thanksgiving, of supplication; you will become more and more detached from self and from the things of the world; you will attain sanctity in the state whereto you have been called of God.

Seeing, then, how vast is the profit to be derived from the remembrance of God's presence, let us habituate our-

selves to it; and this may be done by three principal acts.

The first is to reflect often that wherever we are, God is there also. As the bird that flies is surrounded by air, or the fish that swims in the ocean is surrounded by water, so wherever we go, God is all around us. Remember that He never leaves us, that He observes our every thought, our every action, however secret, however slight, and will apportion to each its reward or chastisement. Frequently make an act of faith in His presence, and keep your eyes continually fixed upon Him.

Secondly, accustom yourself to see God in all His creatures; let every object on which your eyes rest remind you of Him. In the flower that attracts you by its beauty, behold a ray of the divine loveliness; let the stars that spangle the firmament speak to you of the omnipotence of their Creator; when you listen to the song of the birds, thank Him who provides this pleasure for you; when you rejoice in the affection of your relatives, think of His infinite love for you. Thus all around will serve to bring you more closely to Him.

Thirdly, an excellent practice is to make use of ejaculatory prayers. This is of all others the easiest and most profitable manner of realizing God's presence. It is the easiest, because short ejaculations require no effort, no exertion of mind or body; they may be made at any moment, in any place, no matter what we are doing. It is the most profitable, because these aspirations being the outcome of our desires to unite ourselves to God in the bonds of fervent charity, to be with Him and to hold familiar converse with Him, they serve to keep alive within the breast that fire of devotion which renders us prompt to good works.

All the saints advocate the use of these brief supplications. It was their custom to raise their hearts to God whenever the clock struck; St. Alphonsus used to recite

a Hail Mary. We cannot do better than follow their example. Especially in the moment of temptation let us breathe a few words of prayer. These acts of homage are most acceptable to God, and He will bestow on you abundant favors and graces in return.

In conclusion, let me quote the words of St. Thomas of Villanova, a prelate equally renowned for learning and sanctity, when at the point of death. The Brother who was watching beside the dying man, desirous to hear a last word of instruction from his lips, asked him what was the best means of leading a holy life, such as his had been. "My son," the saint replied, "if you would in a short time attain a high degree of sanctity, keep the presence of God always before your mind."

In like manner I say to you, my children, if you desire to live a pure and pious life, familiarize yourself with the thought of God's continual presence. Think of Him when you awake in the morning, while you pursue your varied avocations throughout the day, when alone or in company, in joy or grief, in exultation or humiliation, at all times, in all places. Let your thoughts turn to Him naturally, habitually; and whatever your circumstances, you will not be a prey to anxiety or remorse. And when your life on earth is ended, it will be your happy lot to enjoy the immediate presence of God in heaven, with His blessed Mother, the angels, and the saints.

SERMON XXXIX.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND DIVINE INSPIRATIONS.

MANY souls expose themselves to the danger of eternal perdition through not heeding the divine inspirations; by turning a deaf ear to the voice of love wherewith God calls on them to be converted if they are in a state of sin, or to rise to greater perfection if they are already faithful observers of His law.

Yes, my children, God is good; and of His infinite bounty He vouchsafes to speak to our heart with the accents of a loving Father, an affectionate Friend, a tender Spouse, either enlightening our mind, kindling our will, withdrawing us from evil by poignant remorse, or animating us to good works by the counsels and the examples of others. But it is necessary to listen to His voice, to receive and obey these holy inspirations with docility and readiness, because, if followed, they will prove our consolation in life, our safety in the hour of death; but if disregarded, they will produce distaste in the fulfilment of our duties, indifference to religion, and expose our souls to the risk of perdition. We are all acquainted with the story of the rich young man in the Gospel, who, on hearing from Our Lord's lips the conditions whereon he might attain perfection, went away sad. Had he obeyed the call he might have become one of Christ's most beloved disciples, a zealous apostle, converting whole nations, and gaining Paradise for himself. Through refusing obedience, it is very doubtful, according to the opinion of the Fathers, whether he saved his soul.

The obligation of following the divine inspirations and

the fatal consequences of not doing so will form the theme of the present conference.

What, as a matter of fact, are divine inspirations? They are favors which, in the immeasurable bounty of His loving heart, Our Lord bestows on us from time to time, to guide us towards our final end; gifts so sublime, so precious, that all the most rare and exquisite jewels of earth are not to be compared to them. They are sent to us by God, who, of His infinite wisdom, intends to teach us what it is really important for us to know in order to reach heaven; who, of His tender compassion, constitutes Himself our unseen companion upon life's highway, to comfort, protect, and encourage us on our journey towards our true country.

How many are the various ways in which He communicates His divine inspirations to us! Sometimes He speaks to us by the mouth of His ministers—from the pulpit, in the sacred tribunal of Penance—setting before us the good we ought to do, the evil we ought to avoid, reminding us of death, judgment, the world to come; sometimes it is by means of a book—as was the case with St. Ignatius—which we happen to come across, in whose pages there is some thought which strikes us, some truth which appeals forcibly to our heart, changing us from tepid to fervent; sometimes He makes use of affliction to teach us that our tears cannot be dried, nor our wounds healed by the joys and distractions of the world, that with Him alone, the good Samaritan, can we find solace and succor. And lest we should be in doubt as to whence these holy inspirations come, lest we should doubt whether it is His voice that calls to us, again and again He repeats: "Behold I stand at the door and knock; open to Me, My friend, My sister, My spouse, open to Me and let Me enter in. If thou wilt hear My voice and open to Me, I will come in and sup with thee."

But as in the case of all other gifts of God, these celestial

inspirations are only given us for the one purpose of helping us to attain our final end. They are graces which must not be sterile and fruitless; we must employ them, so as to be able to say with the good servant in the Gospel: "Lord, thou didst deliver to me five talents; behold, I have gained other five." They are materials placed at our disposal for building up the structure of our salvation; woe to us if we fail to make use of them. Those souls are indeed to be compassionated who, sick with the malady of sin, refuse the remedies that would restore them to health; who, poor and needy as they are, prefer to remain in their state of destitution rather than employ the riches held out to them. Unhappy souls, who prize not these salutary graces offered to them by God of His great mercy, graces to which they have no right, and which He is not bound to give! They are gifts of infinite value, for each one has been purchased by the blood of Christ, each one is so rich in grace that, if used aright, it would assure mercy, pardon, help, the possession of God Himself. Witness St. Paul, who obeyed the voice that called to him on the way to Damascus; Matthew, who, at the first invitation of Our Lord, left his profession as money-changer, and followed Him; Zacheus, small in stature but great in determination, who, on hearing that Jesus was approaching, climbed into a tree to see Him; lastly, the good thief, who, touched by the first call of grace, exchanged his cross for a place in Paradise.

God grant, my children, that you may not be among the number of those who obstinately resist the gracious influence of Our Lord when He gently endeavors to induce you to avoid some dangerous occasion, to correct some bad habit, to devote more attention to your spiritual life. How often does this faithful Friend of souls knock at the door of your heart, exhorting you to forsake earthly vanities and serve Him alone. He bids you pay no heed to the devil, who would alarm you by exaggerating the diffi-

culties and disagreeableness to be encountered; He promises to prove no austere or exacting Master. How often, when you kneel in reverent adoration before the tabernacle, you hear his voice softly whisper to your heart, urging you to greater fervor, greater assiduity in prayer; to purity of intention in your actions, doing all for God's glory; to the cultivation of a lowly opinion of yourself; to the bearing of contradiction in humility and silence, remembering how He humbled Himself even to the death of the cross. How often does He ask you to be obedient as He was, to bear with patience and resignation the trials and adversities of life as He did, as the saints did, knowing that the way of the cross is the way to heaven. How often does He set before you the beauty, the worth of modesty and purity, bidding you keep strict watch over your actions, your words, your thoughts, your affections, inviting you to give Him your whole heart, and exclude from it every love that is not love of Him.

And with what dispositions have you listened to these celestial inspirations, what value have you attached to them, what use have you made of them? They have been the means of sanctification to thousands of devout souls who received them with lowly gratitude and profited by them to the utmost; meriting thus to hear the words of commendation addressed by the Master in the Gospel to His faithful servant: "Because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things." Alas! I fear that many among us have turned a deaf ear to the calls of God, or treated them with indifference, and made little use of them; letting the years go by without correcting one bad habit, overcoming one sinful passion; outlawed by the world, unfaithful to grace.

Yet it must be remembered that habitual indifference to divine inspirations leads to final abandonment by God. He will not continue to speak to those who refuse to listen; He will not continue to lavish favors on those

who despise them. The Holy Spirit, speaking by the mouth of the Prophet Isaias and comparing the Christian soul to a vineyard, says: "I fenced it in, and picked the stones out of it, I commanded the clouds to rain upon it; there was nothing that I ought to have done more to my vineyard that I have not done to it; how was it that I looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it hath brought forth wild grapes. I will no longer cultivate it, I will make it desolate."

Hence we see how it is that souls once devout and fervent through disregard of the divine inspirations grow weak in faith and in the love of virtue and gradually become callous to Our Lord's loving entreaties. For the divine inspirations, like a celestial dew, can only fertilize the heart that is open to receive it; it is a supernatural light, but it does not enlighten the eyes that are closed against it. To such persons God addresses these awful words: "Because I called and you refused; you have despised all My counsels and have neglected My reprehensions, I will also mock when that shall come to you which you feared." May it never be your lot, my children, to hear words so appalling! But if you would avert so sad a fate, you must not be deaf to the divine inspirations, for to do so is to court it. Listen to Our Lord with childlike docility when He calls upon you to advance in virtue, to bring forth more abundant fruit for life eternal. Listen to Him when He exhorts you to give more time to prayer, to meditation, to examination of conscience, to sanctify yourself by His word and His sacraments. Say to Him as the child Samuel did: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." Speak to me words of eternal life; tell me what I must do to love Thee more ardently, to serve Thee more faithfully, and I will do it. Tell me what I must do to walk in the way of Thy commandments, and I will obey; tell me what I must do to live as a saint,

and to die as a saint. "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."

Before closing this conference, let me give you an example in the person of Bartolomea Capitanio, the foundress of the Institute of Daughters of Christian Charity in Italy, who lived in the early part of the present century. When about twelve years old, she was sent to a convent-school to be educated. One day, the Sister who taught her class, zealous for the spiritual welfare of her little pupils, asked them, in the course of their religious instruction, which of them desired to become a saint? They were unanimous in declaring this to be their wish. The teacher then asked who would be the first to become a saint? This question gave rise to such emulation and rivalry that it was agreed it should be settled by drawing lots. Some straws of different lengths were procured, as many as there were pupils, and each drew in turn. The longest was drawn by Bartolomea, who was consequently pronounced to be the chosen one.

Delighted at the privilege thus accorded her, she resolved to omit nothing that could help her to prove herself worthy of it, and began to walk valiantly in the way of perfection. Taking as her model St. Aloysius, she strove to imitate him in his innocence and penitence, and in a short time attained a high degree of sanctity. She died young, and was soon after raised to the altars of the Church. But what appeared to be accidental in Bartolomea's case was in reality obedience to an inspiration; at a later period she declared that when the Sister proposed drawing lots she felt interiorly urged to entreat Our Lady that she might be the one chosen; this she did, reciting the Hail Mary several times with the intention, and promising that were her request granted, she would make it her one object to become a saint at any cost.

SERMON XL.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND CHRISTIAN ZEAL.

THERE is one virtue, my children, which appears to be but little practised among you, although it is one which ought to be specially dear to you, for it is most pleasing in God's sight. I refer to Christian zeal; the virtue which consists in laboring to promote the glory of God by rescuing souls from sin, and doing all in your power to lead them to what is good.

One of the principal commandments, binding upon all Christians, and consequently upon you, is to love one's neighbor—that is, to promote his welfare. And since there is nothing higher or more important than our eternal salvation, we cannot better further the interests of our neighbor than by seeking the welfare of his soul, in comparison with which his temporal welfare is of little moment.

Holy Scripture tells us that God has committed to each one of us the charge of his neighbor's soul: "He gave to every one of them commandment concerning his neighbor;" and it is impossible for us truly to love God, or ardently desire that His kingdom should be extended, that He should be adored and loved by all His creatures, without at the same time desiring and endeavoring to procure the salvation of souls, who were so dear to Him, that for their sakes He subjected Himself to humiliations, sufferings, and even the death of the cross.

Hence, we see that Christian zeal is a subject that it is most important to study. Listen to me attentively, therefore, while I speak to you about it, and practise the

counsels God may give you by my lips; for it is not only the glory of God and the salvation of the souls of others that are in question, but your own salvation as well, for we are told in Scripture that he who saves the soul of his brother will certainly not lose his own.

Christian zeal is, then, the ardor which animates us when, loving God and loving our fellow-men for His sake, we perceive that His divine majesty is outraged, or that our neighbor is in danger of eternal perdition, and excited by this ardor, we do whatsoever in us lies to prevent the offence to Almighty God, and to rescue the unhappy souls from the clutches of the devil.

This being so, you see that zeal is not a work of superfluity, nor only of counsel; it is a binding duty for the Christian. How, indeed, can it be otherwise? You are solicitous about the good name of your family, your friends; you would be all eagerness to defend their honor if it were aspersed, and can you be indifferent to the honor of God, as if it were that of a mere stranger?

If you really love God, if this love is the mainspring of all your actions, how can you bear Him to be offended? If you really love your neighbor, if your heart is aglow with this love, how can you tolerate the idea of his being lost eternally? Our duty is enjoined upon us in the clearest manner: "He gave to every one of them commandment concerning his neighbor;" such are the words of Ecclesiasticus. And in Ezechiel we read: "If thou dost not speak to warn the wicked man from his way, I will require his blood at thy hand." "Go," we are told in St. Matthew, "and rebuke thy brother." And if we are commanded to give drink to the thirsty and food to the hungry, how much more ought we to withdraw the sinner from the mire of sin, and—if it be possible—silence an evil-speaker by a timely reprimand, dissuade one who is angry from taking revenge, incite one who is listless and slothful to more energetic action in the service of God.

Contemplate the example of our compassionate Lord: "Look, and do according to the pattern that was shown thee," by His life on earth. How continually, how untiringly He labored for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, making Himself all things to all men. At one time He preaches to the multitudes, at another He instructs the ignorant; now He brings back wanderers to the right path; He regards not the murmurs of the Pharisees, He came to save sinners, and it is with sinners that He mixes. He waits at the well to convert the Samaritan; He awakens her conscience and sends her home a changed woman. He accepts the hospitality of a Pharisee for the sake of saving Magdalen, and, seeing her penitence, He says: "Daughter, thy sins are forgiven thee." And with a few words addressed to Zacheus, He transforms a publican into a fervent disciple. You all know the touching parable of the prodigal son, of the lost coin; of the good shepherd who, leaving the ninety and nine sheep in the fold, went in search of the one that had gone astray. The whole life of Christ was indeed directed only to promote the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

And does it not behoove you to imitate so glorious an example? Can you, who bear the name of Christian, be so lacking in charity as to be indifferent to the insults offered to God and to religion; so selfish as to look on unmoved while others hasten towards the abyss of perdition?

You will, perhaps, ask me what you can do, since you cannot do the work of a parish priest or a missioner. It is not necessary that you should be either the one or the other in order to work for souls within your own sphere. It is not possible, if you love God, that you should not earnestly desire His glory, and the salvation of the souls whom He loves; it is not possible, if you love Him with all your heart and your whole soul, that you

should not feel within your breast that flame of sacred charity which will make you zealous to prevent evil and promote good to the utmost of your power.

If, perchance, some one or other member of your family may, unhappily, have grown neglectful of their duties, heedless of the precepts of the Church, can you not find occasion, with kind and gentle words, to urge them to consider their ways and abandon the evil course they have adopted? If any of your companions or associates have become devotees of pleasure, and apparently forgotten the obligations of their Christian profession, cannot you seek to recall them to the modesty and simplicity which becomes the servants of God, revive in them the spirit of piety and devotion? Cannot you employ your influence to encourage those who are growing weary in well-doing to perseverance, exhort them to abjure the vanities of the world, to resist the temptations of the devil? Cannot you, with a judicious word of rebuke, or at least a look of censure, show your disapproval of unseemly conversation, or silence the uncharitable tongue? Cannot you act as peacemaker, should any unfortunate divisions occur in your family, reconciling those who are at variance, persuading the aggrieved to abstain from taking revenge, and establishing peace instead of strife?

Believe me, my children, wishes and prayers do not suffice; it is not enough to fulfil your domestic and your religious duties, and then withdraw into yourself; or worse still, to shrug your shoulders, and say: If people will lose their souls, they must, I cannot prevent them, it is not my business. No; you ought to cultivate a generous zeal that will increase in proportion as the love of God increases within your heart, just as a flame leaps higher when fresh fuel is thrown on the fire. Do not say, as some do, that evil-doers know right from wrong without your informing them. Remember David; he knew what was right, yet yielding to his passions he fell into

mortal sin and gave scandal to his subjects. Not till the prophet Nathan boldly told him of his crime did he recognize his guilt and repent of his transgression. If knowledge were enough to keep us in the path of virtue, we should not see so many fall away from it, deliberately choosing what is evil.

Christian zeal does not require you to leave your parents and your home, to cross the seas, to make great sacrifices, to expose yourself to perils and privations, or to undertake labors beyond your strength in order to win souls, but only to do what is within your power. How much good may be done by inducing some companion, some friend, to think of her eternal welfare, of the life that will never end. How much good may be done by a discreet expostulation, an opportune word, an affectionate invitation to your neighbor to accompany you to Mass or to approach the sacraments. By embracing every occasion that presents itself to employ your influence for good, you may revive the life of grace in many a soul, and snatch from perdition those who are on the high-road to hell.

You must not, however, expect that your exertions will always be crowned with success. You will meet with proud, misguided souls whom you in your charity would fain rescue from the dark fate that threatens them, who will requite your efforts with ingratitude, and receive your counsels and admonitions with ridicule. But do not let this disquiet you. It is a consolation to the Christian if he can say: I have done my duty; God looks to my efforts, not to my success, and will reward me accordingly; our divine Lord was insulted by those on whom He lavished benefits; no lot is sweeter than to suffer for the spiritual well-being of others, more sublime than to sacrifice one's self to make God honored, more enviable than to shed one's blood for His greater glory and for the salvation of souls.

Keep, then, alive within you, my children, this sacred fire, this holy zeal, which will animate you to spare no sacrifice for the glory of God and the good of souls. Make this the object of your dearest wishes, the aim of your chiefest actions. As far as the soul is more precious than the body, so far is the reward greater which is given to him who ministers to the spiritual needs of his neighbor, than that which is promised to him who relieves his temporal necessities. The charity more acceptable to God than giving bread to the hungry is that which brings back His lost sheep to the fold.

Be zealous then for souls. This is a grand work, my children, a work worthy of the angels, a work pleasing beyond all others to God, a work most rich in merit, for, as St. Chrysostom assures us, to rescue a soul from evil ways is a far higher deed than to distribute an immense fortune to the poor.

SERMON XLI.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND CONFESSION.

It is the opinion of the Fathers and doctors of the Church, one which is supported by solid arguments, that a large proportion of Christians make little progress in virtue, and too many lose their souls altogether, in consequence of imperfect confessions. We are told that St. Teresa one day beheld in a vision a great multitude of souls of every age and condition falling down into hell as thickly as the flakes of snow come down in a heavy snow-storm. Filled with consternation at the sight, she exclaimed: "O my God, wherefore dost Thou permit all these souls to be lost?" And a voice answered her: "They are lost because of confessions badly made." Hence we are warranted in asserting that by good confessions we may ensure our salvation, while bad confessions will certainly cause our damnation.

It may appear somewhat unnecessary that I should enlarge to you, Children of Mary, upon the value and dignity of this sacrament, and the dispositions requisite to receive it with profit. Yet if you ask yourselves whether your examination be thorough, your contrition interior, supernatural, perfect, universal, your self-accusation humble and sincere, and your purpose of amendment firm and efficacious, some among you will not feel complete tranquillity of conscience. For the very frequency with which you approach this sacrament, while it ought to render the due dispositions more easy, is apt to engender a certain carelessness in this respect. It may, per-

haps, therefore be useful to examine into the nature of these dispositions.

The Sacrament of Penance is undeniably one of the most precious gifts God has bestowed on poor humanity. It is the means of removing the stains contracted by the soul since it was first cleansed in the laver of Baptism and of acquiring again the grace we have lost. It is the source whence we derive our greatest blessings, it is the remedy for our worst evils. By it we receive pardon of sin and sanctifying grace ; the eternal punishment due to sin is changed into a temporal penalty, and assistance is given to facilitate our progress in holiness.

But as medicine, if it is to effect the desired results, must be taken under certain conditions, so this sacrament, in order to be of spiritual profit, must be received with the right dispositions. The first requisite is self-examination, that we may discover the sins we have committed.

And here it must be premised that since, as the Apostle says, our sufficiency is of God, and of ourselves we are not able so much as to think a good thought ; and since, as we read in the Council of Trent, without the preventing grace of the Holy Spirit we cannot believe, hope, love, or repent unto justification, it follows that our examination should be preceded by prayer to God, to our blessed Lady, and to our angel guardian, to obtain the needful help to discern our transgressions, to conceive for them real and sufficient contrition, and to confess them aright. For this end we should say with the blind man in the Gospel: "Lord, that I may see." For the human heart is a labyrinth, with many a dark lurking-place, where sins may be concealed, and where it may prove no easy matter to discover them without light from on high.

The next thing is to take the commandments of God and of the Church, and compare your actions with them,

calmly and deliberately, but taking heed not to err on the side of indulgence. For the enemy of mankind, ever desirous to annul the salutary effects of confession, seeks to accomplish his end by representing that one sin is not as great as you think it, that another is not really a sin at all, that the guilt of a third is very doubtful.

Be not deceived, my children. If you desire your examination to be what it ought to be, an anticipation of the judgment of God, place yourself before Him in the spirit of penitence; and with sorrow of soul call to mind the number and nature of your offences against Him, with the aggravating circumstances attending them; imagine that you are called to give an account to Him of every thought and word, of all you have done or left undone. Nor will your examination be thorough unless you search out your hidden faults, both of impulse and deliberation; doubts concerning the faith, ill-regulated desires and affections, antipathies and aversions, suspicions and rash judgments. It will not be thorough unless you examine yourself in respect to sins of the tongue—boastful, unkind, or complaining words; if you pass by irreverence in the house of God, voluntary or habitual distractions of prayer; offences against Christian charity and humility. It will not be thorough if you overlook your omission of your religious duties, coldness or indifference in the performance of them; for these venial sins and imperfections destroy devotion and conduce to tepidity. Only by careful and diligent examination can you acquire that knowledge of the nature, the number, the gravity of your sins which is requisite to make a really good confession and reap its salutary fruit.

Sorrow for sin is, however, the most essential, we may say the vital, part of confession; and it is useless to make the most careful scrutiny of your conscience, to take the utmost pains to ascertain the number of your offences, unless at the end you awaken contrition. Only to the

contrite and humble heart does God promise pardon; He cannot grant forgiveness to those who retain an affection for sin without contradicting Himself. Contrition is, in fact, more necessary than confession; for if the latter is out of our power, God will dispense with it, and accept our good will; but He cannot dispense with penitence, because His nature being perfectly holy, sin is so abhorrent to Him that He cannot be reconciled to the soul that does not hate sin. In a word, in the Sacrament of Penance contrition may supply the place of all else, but nothing can be substituted for contrition.

Now this contrition, which is of such indispensable necessity, must, in order to be valid, be interior, supernatural, perfect, and universal.

It must be *interior;* that is to say, it must penetrate to the inmost part of the soul. From the heart sin comes, therefore repentance must come from the heart. The will consents to, delights in, sin, therefore the will must repudiate its own act. To pronounce a formula of contrition, however strongly worded, is of no avail if it does not come from the heart; it is the husk without the kernel. Even sighs and tears, the outward signs of sorrow, may be the outcome of an impressionable nature rather than of real grief for having offended God. Real contrition consists in hatred and detestation of sin; heartfelt displeasure with one's self for having transgressed God's commandments.

It must be *supernatural;* that is to say, it must arise from motives of faith. Natural contrition is that which is dictated by considerations of human reason, or caused by temporal disadvantage resulting from our misdeeds. To have offended God and repaid His benefits with ingratitude, to have lost heaven and merited hell, to have deprived one's self of the grace which alone renders the soul pleasing to God and fallen under the dominion of Satan, such are the true motives for contrition.

It must be *perfect;* not indeed in intensity, to that human nature cannot attain, but in appreciation. The sinner must sorrow for having displeased his Creator and Redeemer because this is the greatest of all misfortunes; because sin is an evil incomparably greater than any other that can be named. He who sins practically shows that he esteems some object more than God; that he prefers a perishable creature to Him who is the highest good, a fleeting satisfaction to the eternal joys of heaven. He must therefore repent with that perfect sorrow which recognizes God to be infinitely good, and must declare his readiness to suffer anything rather than offend Him again.

Lastly, it must be *universal;* that is to say, it must comprise all the mortal sins that have been committed. For as a man surrounded by enemies knows his life to be in jeopardy until they are all slain, so one mortal sin unrepented of will cause the death of the soul. "Be converted," says the Prophet Ezechiel, "and do penance for all your iniquities; cast away all your transgressions and make to yourselves a new heart and a new spirit."

To contrition a purpose of amendment must be added; a deliberate act of the will, resolving to sin no more in future. Without this, sorrow would be a mere mockery. When you approach the tribunal of penance, you must seriously and firmly resolve to avoid sin and enter upon a new life; to break off whatever binds you to the world, to the indulgence of your passions; to sacrifice anything and everything rather than again offend God. You must say with David: "I have sworn and am determined to keep the judgments of Thy justice." Your purpose of amendment must, like your contrition, not be limited to some particular sins, but embrace all, whether great or small; it must not be restricted to a certain time, but must, at least implicitly, extend over your whole life; it must be vigorous, and generous, and efficacious, and in-

clude not only the avoidance of sin, but of all dangerous occasions of sin. The reason why the Sacrament of Penance does not produce a greater effect in sanctifying the soul, is too often because our purpose of amendment is unstable and impracticable.

After having acquainted yourself as accurately as possible with the number and gravity of your sins, taken due precautions against the danger of relapse, and made a resolution of amendment, nothing remains but to place yourself at the feet of God's minister to make your confession. This, in order to be efficacious, must be sincere and humble.

It must be *sincere.* I will not believe that any one of you, my children, would allow yourself to be so led away by the devil as to conceal a grave sin in confession. But you must remember that if you confess your faults in a half-hearted way, palliating them, making little of them, not divulging their number, nor the circumstances attending them, you are wanting in sincerity and in the spirit of integrity in regard to your spiritual state. In the presence of God's representative, let your endeavor be not to conceal or excuse your faults, but to reveal them with frankness and simplicity, in order to wash them away in the waters of grace which flow from the Saviour's wounds; exposing your evil propensities, your temptations, that your confessor may help you to tear them up by the root, and your soul may be cleansed from every stain in the blood of Christ.

Your confession must be *humble.* God never repels the penitent if he is truly humble; He will regard the humble soul with compassion, embrace it, clasp it to His heart as a beloved child. We are told that the publican who ventured not so much as to lift his eyes to heaven, but struck his breast, confessing himself a sinner, went away justified on account of his humility. Before our confessor we must consider ourselves in presence of our

judge, and humble ourselves accordingly; we are there to accuse, not to excuse, ourselves, and far better is the lowly confession of the sinner who acknowledges and deplores his misdeeds than the self-complacency of the innocent who prides himself in not being guilty of any transgression.

Follow the instructions which I have given you, my children, concerning the Sacrament of Penance, and you will find it a most easy and at the same time effectual means of advancing in holiness, for this sacrament is rich in gifts and graces peculiarly its own. St. John assures us: "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity." Thus you will become more zealous in good works, more assiduous in pious practices, more diligent in fulfilling the duties of your state, more courageous in bearing the trials of life, more worthy of admission into the celestial Paradise.

SERMON XLII.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND FREQUENT COMMUNION.

We are told that the prophet Elias, flying from the persecutions of the wicked Queen Jezebel, went a day's journey into the desert, and there, worn out with fatigue, discouraged and tired of life, he cast himself down in the shade of a juniper-tree, and slept the sleep of the weary. He was roused by an angel, who bade him arise and eat, a vessel of water and a hearth cake being placed by his side. The prophet obeyed; and invigorated by the mysterious food, he was able to pursue his journey with fresh energy, and even to walk in the strength of that meal forty days and forty nights, unto Horeb, the mount of God.

We, too, like Elias, are travellers towards the celestial Horeb, across the desert of this world. Surrounded as we are by enemies, exposed to dangers and temptations of all kinds, how often should we, like the prophet, cast ourselves on the ground, and, weary of the struggle, pray God to take away our life, were it not for a supernatural food which communicates to us courage and strength. This bread is the Most Holy Eucharist, wherein Our Lord gives Himself to be the nourishment of our souls; so that uniting Himself to us by means of His body and blood, He becomes our guide and support in this our pilgrimage.

To-day I propose to speak to you of the advantages of frequent communion; and, in order to convince you of this, I shall point out to you, first, the benefit it is to the soul, and, secondly, the dispositions necessary in order to communicate worthily.

There is no doubt that frequent communion is greatly to be commended and most profitable for the soul. In the first ages of Christianity, all the faithful assembled daily, as St. Luke tells us, to hear the word of God and receive from the apostles' hands the Holy Eucharist. This custom, introduced by the apostles, was kept up for three centuries, while the fact of being a Christian was a crime worthy of death; during that period the converts used to assemble secretly in the Catacombs by night, to hear Mass and receive holy communion.

When the persecutions were at an end, and heresies had arisen, the early fervor and devotion of Christians began to grow cold, and many did not communicate more than once or twice a week. The Fathers and prelates of the Church raised their voices against such tepidity. "Christians," exclaimed St. Ambrose, "if this is your daily bread, wherefore receive it so seldom?" And St. Augustine: "The eucharistic bread is your daily bread; take it, therefore, day by day, that it may support you through each day." In the sixth century, the Church, deploring the diminution of fervor in this respect, made it obligatory, under pain of excommunication, to approach the holy table on all the festivals; two centuries later Pope Fabian remodelled this precept, issuing a decree to the effect that any one who did not communicate at the three great feasts, Easter, Pentecost and Christmas, should forfeit all claims to be a member of the Church. Finally, in consequence of the spread of vice and growth of abuses, the Council of Lateran, in 1215, fixed the rule for every Christian to receive the sacraments at least once a year; this precept was confirmed by the Council of Trent, while it was at the same time strongly urged upon the faithful to communicate frequently, if not every day, the clergy being enjoined to promote this custom among their flocks.

Hence, we see that it is the will of God, the rule He

gives us by the infallible voice of the Church, that we should receive the Holy Eucharist frequently. We see the reason of this; frequent communion preserves the soul from sin, causes it to grow in virtue, and fills it with ineffable sweetness.

First, it preserves the soul from sin. Think for a moment how numerous are the foes that seek to compass our ruin: the world with its seductions, the devil with his wiles, our evil concupiscences that rebel against the spirit, our bad habits, our proneness to sin. Now, against all of these the Holy Eucharist alone can fortify us. It is to the soul what food is to the body. As the food we take preserves the life and health of the body, strengthens and invigorates it, so holy communion fills the soul with grace by means of which we can combat and conquer our spiritual enemies and maintain ourselves in the friendship of God. "My flesh is meat, indeed," Our Lord says; "this is the bread that came down from heaven for the life of the world. He that eateth this bread shall live forever." On this account, St. Augustine observes, the early Christians gave the Holy Eucharist no other name than the Bread of Life; they regarded it as their daily food, their defence against their enemies. "We do not," Tertullian writes, "send our warriors to the fight unfed and unarmed; we fortify them previously with the body of Christ."

But as food must be taken sufficiently often to sustain our physical strength, so holy communion must be received at frequent intervals. If we would persevere in grace, we must approach the fount of life, and drink of the pure waters of grace which flow from this sacrament. And if, my children, your passions are tranquil, if you have a taste for the things of God and keep yourself pure from the corruptions around you, if you do not falter in the way of virtue, give thanks to Jesus Christ, whose Body and blood in holy communion have been your safe-

guard; it is, the Council of Trent teaches, an antidote against mortal sin; a remedy for venial sin.

And as the food of the body not only preserves it from death, but gives power to its members, so the eucharistic bread, besides keeping the soul from sin, causes it to grow in virtue and in the love of God.

The life of the soul consists in sanctifying grace, which renders it pleasing to God. This grace is first imparted to us in the Sacrament of Baptism, and if it has been lost, it is regained in the Sacrament of Penance. The other sacraments communicate an accession of grace, but only if the soul that receives them is already in a state of grace. From none of the sacraments do we derive so great an increase of grace as from the Holy Eucharist, for in it we receive Him who is the Author of all grace. Entering into our heart, He unites it to Himself in the most perfect union; He warms it with the fire of His divine charity; He eliminates from it all opposing qualities, all weakness and earthly attachments; He kindles it, He invigorates it, He transforms it into Himself, and, in a sense, divinizes it. Our Lord says: "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me and I in him." He incorporates us with Himself, so that we can say with the Apostle: "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me." The soul that is thus inflamed with divine love allows no difficulties to daunt her, no wiles to ensnare her, no obstacles to arrest her progress in the way of virtue. This it is that gives courage to martyrs; which makes all sufferings light, all sacrifices easy.

Lastly, the Holy Eucharist fills the soul with ineffable sweetness. In fact, if it be true that in holy communion we are united to God, who constitutes Himself the felicity of the saints, how can we in communicating be otherwise than happy and joyful? Our Lord is the source of all our joy; and possessing Him, St. Paul says, "I have all and abound."

Witness those holy souls who on receiving their Lord were inundated with such celestial sweetness that they seemed to hear His voice speaking to them, to feel the pressure of His chaste embrace. Witness those who after holy communion knew not how to contain themselves for the excess of their happiness; those who, transported out of themselves, were fain to implore that the torrent of supreme and supernatural consolations might be diminished; those who actually fainted away, overcome by the abundance of the divine sweetness.

Have not you also tasted something of this sweetness on receiving holy communion? Have you not sometimes shed tears of devotion, of love? Have you not felt how insipid and worthless are the consolations, the pleasures, the amusements of the world? When, if not after holy communion, have you experienced real peace, real consolation, real happiness? We find the explanation of this in the words the Church addresses to Our Lord in reference to this sacrament: "Thou gavest them bread from heaven, containing in itself all sweetness."

We will now briefly consider what are the dispositions requisite for receiving Our Lord frequently and worthily.

The first is a lively faith. We must believe that Jesus, the Lamb without spot, the Holy of holies, He who is all purity and sanctity, is present in the sacred Host; that we verily and indeed receive the body and blood, the soul and divinity of Him who redeemed us by His passion and death, and who will one day be our Judge; we must believe this not only with a faith so strong and vigorous as to allow no doubt to arise in our mind, but believe even more firmly than if we had the testimony of our senses to the truths we confess.

And if we believe thus firmly, we shall not be wanting in humility, which is the second disposition. Who and what am I, let each ask himself, that I should receive within my heart a God of infinite majesty, before whom

the angels bow down in reverent adoration? If the Centurion, a man rich in faith and good works, declared himself unworthy that Thou shouldst enter his roof, how should I, with all my faults and miseries, venture to approach Thy holy table? With Peter I must exclaim: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man; yet without Thee what will become of me?" My heart is weak, it is attached to creatures, I have been disobedient to Thy inspirations, a slave to sin; but Thou hast come not for the just but for sinners; for those who are sick and need the physician, not for those who are whole; I come therefore to Thee, O inexhaustible Fount of grace and mercy, to enrich my poverty, to obtain the help I need.

We must, moreover, excite in ourselves a great desire to receive this divine Guest; we must hunger for this celestial food, for the greater the longing of the soul, the greater the grace she obtains. Shall we not earnestly desire to receive a God of such infinite goodness and mercy, who comes down from heaven to give His body to be our spiritual sustenance, and a pledge of the eternal glory in store for us? He is the tender Spouse, the faithful Friend, the loving Father who comes to lavish on us His choicest benedictions.

And when you have received your Lord, hold converse with Him as long as possible, for this is a most precious time, a time wherein to obtain immense treasures of grace. Thank Him for the supreme favor He has shown you, breathe forth your heart to Him in holy and loving aspirations, promise to love Him more and more and never again wilfully to offend Him. Do not, St. Teresa says, lose so favorable an opportunity for spiritual commerce; God is wont to repay liberally those who entertain Him well. Ask of Him light to guide you on life's uncertain path, where you are beset with snares on every hand; ask of Him strength to renounce the vanities, the pleasures of the world, and adopt the best

means to accomplish your sanctification ; ask of Him, above all, the gift of final perseverance. Do not dwell too much on your own unworthiness ; had you the purity and sanctity of an angel or a saint, you would not be worthy to receive Him who is perfect holiness. Endeavor to correspond to His infinite bounty ; not content with placing so unspeakable a treasure within your reach, He invites you to draw nigh, He awaits to enter into your heart, to unite Himself to you, to speak to you the words of life, to give you a forestaste of celestial joys.

Happy are you if you draw near to feed on the immaculate flesh of Jesus at least every month ! More happy still if you come on every festival of obligation ! Worthy of all praise and of our holy envy if every day, or almost every day, you present yourself with the necessary dispositions to eat the Bread of Angels, which transforms into angels the poor creatures who dwell in this world of ours !

SERMON XLIII.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND DANGEROUS OCCASIONS.

A FAMILIAR proverb tells us that "occasion makes the sinner." Our own experience proves how true this is; no virtue is so firm as not to be liable, if incautiously exposed to occasions of sin, to fall in the most deplorable manner; no resolution so firm and steadfast that may not, in perilous circumstances, melt away as wax before the fire.

It is on account of this proneness to fall, inherent in human nature, that Our Lord repeatedly admonishes us in forcible language to avoid occasions of sin. "If thy hand scandalize thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands, to go into hell, into unquenchable fire. And if thy foot scandalize thee, cut it off. It is better to enter lame into life everlasting, than having two feet, to be cast into the hell of unquenchable fire." In other words, He says to us: O My children, if you find yourselves in presence of any objects that may seduce you, that incite you to evil, flee from them. Give them up, though it be some individual dearer to you than the sight of your eyes; something as valuable to you as the use of your hands; some conversation, some company as pleasurable to you as the power of walking upon your feet. Better, better far to reach heaven without having tasted these delights, than, having enjoyed them, to be cast into the flames of hell.

Warned by the exhortations of our divine Master, how can we sufficiently condemn the presumption of those who do not fly dangerous occasions, but rather

court them, heedless of the great risk they run? We know the words of Holy Scripture: "He that loveth danger shall perish in it."

By dangerous occasions, I mean those occasions wherein one is exposed to danger of sinning. If these always lead us to sin, they are called proximate occasions; if not, remote. I do not intend to speak of proximate occasions, because the mere fact of exposing one's self to them voluntarily is a sin, but of remote occasions; they are what you ought to avoid, because by not doing so you imperil what is important beyond all else—your eternal salvation. It is only too well known how weak is our power of resistance, and how potent, on the contrary, are the attractions of an alluring object. Through the fall of our first parents our whole nature has been weakened; the intellect is enfeebled in its discernment of truth and falsehood; the will is enfeebled in its choice between good and evil. The strong part of us is in the flesh, which rebels continually against the spirit, and drags us down to the mire of sin. Seeing we are thus weakened, how overwhelming is the power exercised over us by some seductive object that fascinates the senses, misleads the reason, and captivates the will. And if the mere image, as fancy depicts it to us, has power to excite complacency and stimulate desire, how difficult to resist the spell it will cast over the affections and the will when the attractive object is present to the senses! Those who rashly expose themselves to such danger will surely, as Holy Scripture says, be overcome by it.

Take the instance of St. Peter. Trusting too much to his own strength, he thought himself invincible, and carried presumption so far as voluntarily to seek out an occasion of falling. Having entered Caiphas' house, he mixed on a footing of good-fellowship with the soldiers who had arrested Christ, and stood with them at the fire

warming himself. Recognized by the portress and pointed out as a disciple of the Nazarene, all his vaunted courage forsook him, and he who had protested that he would lay down his life rather than be unfaithful to his Master, denied all knowledge of Him in the most cowardly manner. Can we hope to prove more valiant than an apostle, weak reeds that we are, swayed by every blast? What folly to think we can walk upon ice and not slip, and can cast ourselves into the fire and not be burnt! Are we wiser than Solomon, who, through too great familiarity with heathen women, became an idolater like them? Are we stronger than Samson, who, frittering away his time with the charming Delila, allowed that treacherous woman to extort from him the secret of his extraordinary power, and thus lost his liberty and his life?

If heroes such as these, through wilfully exposing themselves to occasions of sin, fell ignominiously, can you think to escape when a word, a glance, is enough to kindle your passions, the bad example of a companion to cause your ruin? Do not be so childish as to believe that you can indulge in undue familiarities with persons of the opposite sex, listen to immodest conversation, attend theatrical performances in which decency is not respected, read works imbued with the poison of vice; do not imagine that, unless you carefully avoid these and other occasions, far more if you voluntarily run into them, you will not fall headlong into the abyss of sin. Believe me, in this warfare it is the timid who conquer, because they take to flight; while those who confide in their own strength encounter the peril and succumb to it.

The reason of this is evident when we reflect that on dangerous occasions not only are we weak and temptation strong, but the assistance granted us is less abundant. We know that God gives timely help in the hour of danger, but He does this according to His own will,

not ours. The soul that rashly exposes herself to peril is abandoned to her own resources. She has despised His warning, and He consequently withholds the grace which would keep her from falling. In the temptations permitted by God to assail us, He promises His aid, but not in those that we make for ourselves. He has given His angels charge over us, to keep us in all our ways, yet if we choose to precipitate ourselves from a height, the angels will not prevent us from breaking our neck.

Do not imagine that you must withdraw from the world and retire into seclusion in order to avoid the occasions of sin whereby you are surrounded. You can lead a pure life in the world provided you conduct yourself with prudence and circumspection. It is not necessary to fly the company of your fellow-men, but to make choice of companions whose conversation is edifying; you need not abjure all recreations and amusements, so long as you only frequent those which offer no enticements to evil.

See, then, my children, that you fly from all occasions which may lead to sin. Do not think to defy the danger; flee from it. Would you not hasten away from a meadow if you knew venomous snakes to be hidden in the grass? Would you linger in a house if you were told it was on fire? And if you would thus avoid bodily danger, how much more that which menaces the soul!

Keep strict watch over your senses; fortify your will by firm resolutions; safeguard your heart by the practice of mortification; above all, be fervent in prayer. And then amid the dangers that surround you, dangers not of your own making, your own seeking, God, our blessed Lady, and your guardian angel, will hold you by the hand and not permit your feet to slip.

You may perhaps incur ridicule on the part of those who deem such care and circumspection unnecessary. Do not let this trouble you, do not let it deter you from flying all occasions of sin. Without this Christian pru-

dence you will be liable to fall at every step, to fall from one sin into another, and prove by your own experience the truth of the words already cited: "He that loveth danger shall perish in it."

And as in many cases the danger may come upon you unawares, continually implore Our Lord to grant you a liberal supply of grace. Thus if you do your own part diligently with the help of God, you will pass your days in innocence and holiness, as becomes those who are proud to call themselves by the glorious title of *Children of Mary.*

SERMON XLIV.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND BALLS.

OUR conference to-day is to be on the subject of balls. First of all I must remind you that what is true of balls in one country is often quite untrue in another; and that the question whether they are lawful to the Child of Mary must depend in great measure on the nature of the society amid which her lot is cast. In some countries and places they may be absolutely unlawful, so that a maiden who desires to keep her purity unsullied can scarcely frequent them without serious sin; elsewhere they may be comparatively harmless and innocent. In some places it may be the duty of the Child of Mary to avoid them entirely; in others she may, with certain precautions of which we shall speak presently, find in dancing a healthy and innocent recreation, and there are occasions when it may be a duty to be present and to take part in what is in itself a lawful and pleasurable amusement. The Church has never absolutely condemned dancing, and has never absolutely condemned balls, and when Christian writers and theologians have condemned and forbidden them, it has always been because the corrupt state of society, and low standard of morals prevalent, have rendered it necessary that the lovers of modesty and purity should keep aloof from all occasions where the indiscriminate intercourse of the sexes is sure to lead to unchristian license and to positive sin. In the time of

the Fathers of the Church, the corruption of manners that had prevailed in a purely pagan society, and which still continued to exist in many places, even after the Christian law of purity had been proclaimed to the world, rendered the presence of Christian maidens at a ball an act of unfaithfulness to their religion, and an almost certain occasion of mortal sin. It was for this reason that we find the Christian writers of early times inveighing against balls from the pulpit, alleging them to be a diversion too dangerous to be indulged in, unworthy of a Christian, the source of innumerable sins. They did not hesitate to assert openly that to take part in them was contrary to the spirit of the Church and the precepts of religion. Let the daughters of a bad mother frequent balls, says St. Ambrose, and they will become like her; but let modest and prudent maidens hold aloof from them, unless they desire their own perdition. St. Basil speaks thus: "If men and women assemble together to amuse themselves with dancing in public, very often their souls become the prey of the devil. I scarcely know for whom I tremble most, the unmarried or the married woman; the former works the loss of her virginal purity, the latter of her conjugal fidelity." They wrote thus in days when heathen license still prevailed, but their words are applicable to other times beside their own. There were times in the Middle Ages, and unhappily there are times and places still, where the state of morals make total abstinence from any public dancing an imperative duty. Thus we find St. Charles Borromeo declaring that in his day it was scarcely possible for any one to go to a ball without committing some serious sin. Other saints, seeing the disastrous effects that the frequenting of balls had on the morals of the young, employ yet more forcible language in their denunciation of them; they declare public dances to be an invention of the devil, taught to Jews and Christians by their pagan neighbors, whose un-

godly practices it becomes not the followers of Christ crucified to imitate.

In the present day, in most countries which call themselves Christian, we should rightly regard such language as this exaggerated, if it be universally applied to balls in general without discrimination. Many a Christian virgin, who has never lost her purity of heart, and now perhaps lives in the sweet seclusion of convent life, was in her early days an enthusiastic lover of the dance. In many a private dance and even in many a public ball, she found an intense and a perfectly innocent enjoyment, not merely in the staid and sober quadrille, but in the graceful movements and the exhilarating effects of mazurka and of waltz. No thought of evil ever occurred to her innocent mind, and she was wont to offer to God her grateful thanks for pleasure derived therefrom, as for every other good gift that God had given her to make her path through life a happy and a pleasant one. If such cases as these are comparatively rare, it is not because there is any inherent evil in the dance, but because the corrupt minds of men and women find an occasion of sin in what is in itself harmless. If some of the saints evinced a sort of dread for the dance, it was either because in their days, as we have said, it too often degenerated into sinful license, or because the road by which God led them on to perfection was one which suggested to them to sacrifice all worldly pleasures and pastimes, in order that they might the more unreservedly consecrate both body and soul to their divine Spouse.

But if dancing is in itself perfectly harmless, it is for many, and perhaps for most, attended by serious dangers. As carried on in modern society, there are many things connected with it, which are very often a remote, and too often a proximate occasion of sin. The late hours and the luxurious surroundings, the heated atmosphere and the wine that flows freely to assuage the thirst of the

dancers, the giddy whirl of the dance, the close embrace of your partner's arm, the sense of being passive in his hands as he carries you through the mazes of the dance, the low dress you wear, closely approaching, if not actually passing, the limits of maidenly modesty,—all these combine together to be to many a serious source of peril. There is no doubt that their too frequent effect is to rouse the passions, to suggest evil thoughts, which, amid the excitement of the dance, it is by no means easy to resist. There are, I know, many who, through the mercy of God, are not liable to such temptations, and if this is the case with you, you must thank God for it, but remember that none of us are ever safe, and the devil may be watching for some convenient time to tempt us in a way in which we have never been tempted before. If, however, you have experienced such temptations while dancing, do not forget, that even though you may never have yielded to them, you are bound to avoid, as far as you can, the occasions that give rise to them. But if you have yielded to them, if you have allowed any immodest thoughts or impure feelings to take possession of you, then you are bound, as you value the salvation of your soul, to shun the scenes and places, the company and the amusement, which have been to you the cause of sin against God and have made you unworthy to call yourself a Child of Mary. Besides this, there are other sins to which balls too often lead. They encourage and foment vanity, love of display, craving for admiration, and thirst for excitement. Have you not found that your religious fervor, your devotion, grew cold in proportion as your passion for dancing and for appearing in the ballroom increases? Believe me, the love of the world and the love of God cannot go hand in hand.

Remember, my dear children, that at the baptismal font you solemnly promised to renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh, and all their works. This is not a

mere matter of counsel, a pious practice that you are at liberty to perform or not at will; it is a solemn promise which you are pledged to fulfil, the most solemn in fact of all promises. And to you who are members of this association, all this applies the more particularly. Recall the promise you made to the Blessed Virgin, kneeling before her altar, in the presence of your companions, in the presence of the whole company of heaven; you then promised from that day forth to openly profess yourselves her children and servants, to walk in her steps, to imitate her virtues, more especially her angelic purity, and you entreated her to obtain for you the grace to remain faithful to these vows all your life long. Ask yourself whether your love of dancing and of balls is compatible with walking in Mary's footsteps and imitating her spotless purity.

Yet do not imagine that in warning you of the serious danger of balls, I wish to put a veto on all such diversions. Piety is not antagonistic to the innocent gayeties and enjoyments of life, it is not incompatible with interest in the concerns and pleasures of earth. The Psalmist exhorts us to serve the Lord with gladness; the Apostle bids us to rejoice with those that rejoice; and Our Lord Himself did not disdain to sanctify by His presence the harmless convivialities and recreations of men. Therefore think not that all relaxations and social amusements are to be denied you; only see that they are innocent, see that you use them with moderation, not allowing them to engross too great a part of your thoughts and affections.

And if you are required by your position and circumstances to go to balls, beware of the dangers to which frequenters of the ballroom are inevitably exposed, the spirit of the world that is inhaled in its heated atmosphere; above all, remember the high standard to which, as Children of Mary, you are pledged to aspire.

SERMON XLV.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND BAD COMPANIONS.

HOLY SCRIPTURE tells us that he that has found a friend has found a treasure. A faithful friend is, in fact, a powerful protection, a valuable help amid the vicissitudes of life. The Fathers of the Church are eloquent in their eulogy of friendship; there is no greater boon here below than to have a heart in which one may confide; to enjoy intimate intercourse with one who is prudent and virtuous for the mutual exchange of thought and feeling, for the giving and receiving of solace and succor. So true is this, that, to quote the words of an old writer, to banish friendship from the world would be folly equal to that of one who would quench the light of the sun.

But if a good and holy friendship is an inestimable treasure, nothing, on the contrary, is more pernicious than a bad and ill-chosen friendship; for as the viper ejects upon all who approach it the venom concealed under its fangs, so the false friend cannot rest without communicating to those who connect with him the poison of error and moral corruption wherewith his own soul is imbued.

This is true for persons of every age, but especially for you, my children. For the young are naturally expansive and confiding; they feel the need of affection and sympathy, and, in their inexperience, unsuspicious of the snares and deceptions of which the world is full, they are ready to make friends at first sight, to enter into close relations with one in whose company they have been but a few hours. Nor does it occur to them to consider

whether the newly formed friendship will be for weal or woe, whether it will be conducive or detrimental to the health of their soul. Nothing, therefore, is more important for you than prudence in the choice of your friends, care in selecting for your companions persons of known piety and virtue. But even more important still is the avoidance of evil companions, if you really have at heart the well-being of your soul. And as the weary mariner needs but to have the rocks pointed out to him in order that he may avoid them, so I doubt not that a few words on my part will suffice to warn you against forming friendships which can be productive of nothing but harm.

Just as a true and solid friendship which unites the hearts of virtuous persons by a mutual exchange of affection and of confidence, and proves a support and alleviation in times of adversity, is worthy of all praise, and is extolled in Scripture, so, on the other hand, the friendship of the ungodly and immoral cannot be too strongly reprobated or too studiously avoided. It is a means whereof the devil makes constant use in his unceasing endeavors to entrap unwary souls.

For the most part, conscious that the aspect of open and avowed wickedness, of unmasked vice, would repel rather than attract, he employs as his instrument, one—whether a young man or a maiden—who will study the proclivities, discover the mode of thought, the manner of life, the tastes of his victim, and conform himself to them. And while by these wiles he has succeeded in becoming a friend, he begins, as it were casually, to describe the attractions of those amusements which, although occasions of danger, are frequented by persons of good repute. The real step is to speak slightingly of the truths of religion, of the laws of the Church; to cast censure on the devout life, as productive of melancholy; then, having introduced the thin end of the wedge, he

proceeds to give utterance to words of equivocal meaning, capable of double construction, words flattering to the passions, suggestive of evil, or anecdotes of a questionable nature on subjects that would call a blush to the cheek of every right-minded individual. Thus, these emissaries of Satan accomplish the perversion of those who listen to them, render them ashamed of fulfilling their religious duties and of appearing to serve God, and induce them gradually to fall away from the Church, and from the sacraments. Finally, these unhappy persons forsake the path of virtue altogether, and walk in the ways of iniquity.

Now, tell me, can it be prudent to form such friendships as these? The Holy Spirit warns us against them by the lips of the Wise Man: "My son, if sinners shall entice thee, consent not to them. Walk not thou with them, restrain thy foot from their paths, for their feet run to evil," and those who are found in their company are involved in the same perdition. And again: "He that walketh with the wise shall be wise, but a friend of fools shall become like unto them."

Alas! vice, like the pestilence, is only too surely communicated by contact. Even in heaven the influence of one proud spirit, Lucifer, who rebelled against God, was enough to pervert a vast number of his companion angels, and transform them into demons. How can you hope for safety, who have not the sanctity of the angels, who breathe not the pure air of Paradise, but the vitiated atmosphere of earth?

Believe me, it is impossible to associate with the wicked, to listen to their ungodly maxims, to familiarize one's self with their scandalous actions, and not be corrupted by them unless a miracle were worked on one's behalf. One might as well hold a scorpion to one's bosom and expect not to be stung. Remember the well-known proverb: "A man is known by his friends."

But, some of you may be inclined to say, may not an opposite effect be produced, and the result of holding intercourse with the ungodly be to bring them back to the right way? After all, too, we are not children, to be so easily led astray.

It cannot be denied that this may possibly be the case, and I can conceive no greater joy in the whole world than that of bringing back to God an unhappy transgressor who has been living in oblivion of eternal things. Yet, you know, this is not the ordinary result. As a small portion of leaven will cause a quantity of dough to ferment, as one rotten fruit will spoil all the good fruits that are garnered with it, so it is more probable that one evil companion will corrupt many good, than that the many good will convert the one that is evil. For it is, indeed, a difficult task to recall the sinner from the error of his ways! Easier by far is it to lead astray a soul that is accustomed to the practice of virtue; for by our perverse nature we are so prone to evil, that in the former case we are like a boatman who has to row against wind and tide, whereas in the latter he needs but to let his bark drift with the current.

Nor must you allow yourselves to think that having been brought up from your infancy in piety and the fear of God, having grown in virtue day by day as members of this pious association, you have no cause for fear if you mix with undesirable companions. The saints, who were giants in virtue, did not think thus; we learn from their lives, that, having witnessed the falls of others, and being conscious of their own frailty, they ever mistrusted themselves. And if they, whose virtue was the fruit of severe and persevering exercise, did not deem themselves secure, and consequently shunned the company of evil-doers most carefully, can you expect to be unfaltering and inflexible, to stand unmoved, who are but beginners in the spiritual life? If saints trembled and were afraid, how

much the more ought you to shrink from encountering dangers confessedly of no slight magnitude. Remember that the Apostle admonishes all who desire to live a Christian life to withdraw from the society of the ungodly and live in the world as if not of the world. Nay, more, he would have them separate themselves not only from sinners, but from all who allow themselves too much license, and do not aim at the perfection required of those who bear the name of Christians. And in this he does but interpret the words of Christ, who, gentle and compassionate as He was, declared that He came to bring a sword upon earth, to sever the closest and tenderest ties if they were prejudicial to the soul's health. And we know the saying: "Better alone than in bad company." Experience at all times teaches that the society of the ungodly leaves in the heart and the mind seeds of evil, which sooner or later will bear baneful fruit.

Be most cautious, then, my children, in the choice of your friends. Do not be intimate with young men who are vain and ambitious lovers of themselves. Do not admit to your friendship girls who are devoured with curiosity, who want to know all about every one, who live on idle gossip, nor those who are inveterate talkers, who talk of and talk against all their neighbors. For friendship with such persons, though it appear harmless, is sure to turn out ill. The heart is a precious gift; foolish indeed are you if you bestow it on the first comer, without ascertaining if it be one whose virtue renders her worthy of your love and your trust; whether there exist between you such sympathy of thought and feeling, such similarity of likes and dislikes, such harmony of character and tastes, as is necessary to a true and lasting friendship.

Above all, fly from bad companions; hold aloof from them as scrupulously as the Jews of old did from lepers, whom they would not allow to approach them, lest the

healthy should take the infection of their awful disease. Be assured that by so doing you will lose nothing, but, on the contrary, you will in every way promote your own advantage.

SERMON XLVI.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND WORLDLY SOCIETY.

ANOTHER grave danger to which young people are exposed in the world is found in the social gatherings for the purpose of conversation, to which they are invited. The persons who attend them being chiefly lovers of earthly vanities, strangers to the devout life, the tone given to the conversation is one of frivolity and worldliness, that dissipates the mind and enervates the heart, rendering it unfit for the serious concerns of God and of the soul.

Doubtless conversation in itself is an innocent and laudable amusement, ordained by God as a relaxation both of mind and body. And if it be employed for this good end nothing is more profitable for mutual encouragement in the discharge of duty, for initiating and carrying out good and useful works. But, alas! instead of being a means of recreation and edification, conversation, like other precious gifts of God, is liable to be lamentably abused, and is too often turned into an instrument of harm. To no class of persons are those social gatherings or receptions more dangerous than to the young, on account of their being especially susceptible to undesirable impressions. Besides, where one might expect to find the conversation exhibiting charity and discretion, good principles, and all that is most favorable to virtue and morals, very often, on the contrary, it is the custom to encourage license of speech, unseemly jests, a spirit of opposition to the maxims of the Gospel; and thus a subtle poison is instilled into the minds of the unwary

individuals who frequent these entertainments and delight in them.

Yet who ever gives a serious thought to this matter? If one can but talk as much as one pleases and pass an hour or two agreeably, if one can but laugh and joke with one's acquaintances, what else matters? I intend therefore to-day to warn you of the dangers you incur by frequenting these assemblies.

First of all, it is necessary to state that I refer principally to the familiar intercourse which is usual in society between men and women, whether young or old it matters not; nor is it of any consequence whether the receptions are at your own home or in the house of your acquaintances, in town or country; whether they are evening parties or morning entertainments. There are others to which ladies only are invited, which are less productive of danger, but are not free from peril if the company consists of worldly persons and those whose life is by no means edifying.

For young women inexperienced in the ways of the world to be thrown much into the society of men is generally attended with a certain danger. "Too great familiarity between men and women," says St. Teresa, "is not advisable; for all are not like the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, whose mutual companionship only conduced to their greater sanctity." Holy Scripture warns young men in regard to this, and young women may apply the warning to themselves: "Tarry not among women, for from garments cometh a moth, and from a woman the iniquity of a man."

And if, as the Apostle says, evil communications corrupt good manners, surely it is impossible to mix with impunity in society where great freedom of speech is allowed, where vice is excused, embellished, and even extolled; society in which insinuations are made hostile to the faith and the devout life is spoken of with thinly

veiled contempt; society in which the laws of the Church and the decrees of the Sovereign Pontiff are discussed, and even censured, under an appearance of candor and zeal; society in which libels and slanders are freely circulated, and every one seeks to take precedence of and outshine others; society in which charity is outraged and malicious tongues seek to destroy the reputation of their neighbor, a treasure more valuable to him than untold riches.

Believe me, my children, the devil is not new to his work; he is old in cunning and deceit, and nothing gratifies him more than to entice young people into the company of agreeable persons who, by their conversation, will play into his hands. Thus he will mislead you as he misled Eve; nothing was further from her thoughts than disobedience to God's commands when she first entered into conversation with the serpent, but after listening to him she fell from the state of innocence. Let it be remembered that Holy Scripture counsels us to depart from the way of sinners, to have no part with them, lest we be involved in their transgressions. Consider how frail you are, how subject to fall, how open to temptation. And if you do not feel, as some do, the force of your passions, do not imagine it is because you are devoid of them, it is simply because they are quiescent at present; they are there, ready some day to awake in full power if you risk your safety by mixing with the votaries of the world. The saints, extenuated by fasts, vigils, and austerities—the saints who attained such proficiency in piety and the fear of God—dreaded mixing in general society as they would the touch of a viper, for they knew that many a virtuous soul had lost the crown she might have gained through lack of caution in this respect. If you are concerned for the beauty and purity of your soul; if you desire one day to become the companion of angels, do not deceive yourself. "He that

toucheth pitch shall be defiled with it, and he that hath fellowship with the proud shall put on pride." If you walk on the brink of the precipice, you will undoubtedly fall into it.

Not that I desire you to withdraw altogether from society, to decline all invitations, to refuse to engage in conversation with strangers, and thus get the character of being eccentric and unpolished. Do all that duty, that good manners, that the exigencies of your position require of you, but be guided by the rule of the Gospel, not the maxims of the world.

It is not only by mixing in general society that a young girl is exposed to danger; the company of persons of her own sex whose life is essentially worldly is no less harmful. When ladies of this class meet together, what does their conversation consist of but the discussion of entertainments, festivities, dress, the fashions, love-making, marriages? No one can frequent the company of such as these without harm. Even if one does not approve it at first, in time it produces some effect; human respect, or perhaps your own heart, deteriorated by the influence to which it has been subjected, will induce you to abandon some of your religious practices and adopt the opinions and conform to the manners of the world.

St. Teresa, writing of herself in her girlhood, says that she had a relative who was a very frequent visitor at her parents' house. "This lady," she says, "was extremely frivolous and giddy in ways and manners of proceeding, so much so that my mother did all she could to prevent her from coming so often, but she always had so many reasons and excuses for her visits, that it was impossible to put a stop to them. I took a great liking to this person, and was always with her and talking to her, for she helped me to join in the pastimes I most enjoyed, and fomented my love of them by telling me about her vanities and dissipations. My father and my sister dis-

approved greatly of this friendship, and often rebuked me for it; but, as they could not banish the object of it, they prevailed nothing, for I always found the means of outwitting them. Would that all parents would take warning by my example, and be extremely careful and particular with whom their daughters consort; for this intimacy changed me so much that all my good dispositions and my natural inclination to virtue seemed to forsake me."

Wherefore if you are invited and even begged by worldly persons to join their social gatherings for conversation or work, do not accept their invitation, knowing that you are forbidden by the law of God to associate with those who may be to you an occasion of falling. Do not listen to them, if they seek to entice you with flatteries and honeyed words; hold aloof from them, for their ways are perverse, as we read in the Proverbs, and their path inclineth to evil.

I must now add a few words concerning the conversation that goes on among you when two or three or more of you are together. I know you require some relaxation and harmless recreation, and nothing is a more innocent amusement, a greater relief to the mind, than for friends to talk to each other. But beware lest you waste your time in idle chatter, lest you say anything that may hurt the feelings of another, that may awaken an undesirable train of thought, that may give rise to wrongful desires. Do not indulge in frivolous and worldly conversation, in which trifles are made of great importance and those matters which ought to be of the deepest interest to those who seek to serve God faithfully are never touched upon; for this is reprehensible in a Child of Mary. It will be the means of leading you to form a false estimate of the relative value of things, to the prejudice of what ought to be your primary object, your greater spiritual profit. Beware also of excessive talk, of pouring

out a stream of words, generally mere babble, in which there is not a particle of good sense. Beware of the love of gossip, the mania for hearing and knowing all about everybody, which can only fill the mind with folly and render serious thought distasteful, not to speak of the precious time thus lost, time of which we shall one day have to give account to God.

There is no lack of useful and innocent subjects which would form interesting topics of conversation, and afford you a means of pleasant and cheerful recreation without introducing any danger of dissipation of mind, of time ill-spent. Remember this, my children, and you will enjoy the solace felt by the Christian in the accomplishment of duty and the practice of virtue.

SERMON XLVII.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND BAD BOOKS.

BESIDES those that we have already discussed, there is yet another source of danger to the Child of Mary which must not be overlooked, and that is bad books.

In the present day, side by side with the spread of useful knowledge and the advance of science, another kind of knowledge—the knowledge of evil—has also increased immensely and wrought sad havoc in religion and morality by means of a corrupt Press. It is true that at all times bad books have been printed and published; but they were not widely circulated, and were seldom sold openly. Now they constitute an article of commerce, and the sale of them is carried on with the utmost publicity and to a vast extent. They are met with everywhere: in the libraries and on book-stalls, under the form of pamphlets and periodicals, novels and graver works, in editions so cheap as to bring them within the reach of all. Productions of this nature are disseminated everywhere, instilling their subtle poison into the veins of the social body, exhaling corruption wherever they go, stirring up hostility to God and to the Church He has founded.

The worst is, that while the tide of foul literature has inundated the towns, and even found its way into remote villages, Christian people, who ought to be on their guard against such books, do not hesitate to read them: they are to be found in the hands not only of the educated classes, but of the uneducated; artisans and workmen, women and even girls, devour them with feverish

eagerness. Thus young men and women, once modest and prudent, now drink unblushingly of this fatal draught; the poison, sweet to the taste, and presented in a gilded chalice, perverts the mind and corrupts the heart.

My children, it is to be hoped that you have never read any of these books which are calculated to weaken faith, destroy devotion, and ruin morals. Nevertheless, I consider it my duty to speak of them to you, and warn you of the risk you run, if you are so imprudent, so ill-advised, as to peruse them.

Nothing has greater influence upon the conduct than the thoughts which occupy the mind; hence it is that bad books have so disastrous an effect upon their readers. Whether these publications are directed against faith or against morals they have one and the selfsame object—to do the devil's work, to destroy faith and promote profligacy. Some represent the life of the cloister under a ludicrous, a contemptible, or a pitiable aspect; some traduce the Supreme Pontiff, the bishops, and the clergy, inventing scandals and calumnies, accusing them of ambition and avarice, of exaggeration and fanaticism, and even hinting that, but for respect for their office, worse revelations might be made. Or they speak with covert sneers of miracles, of the dogmas of the Church, of pious practices, of persons who lead a devout and unworldly life. Others, again, attack morality: dwell upon illicit amours, depict vice in attractive colors, describe scenes tending to inflame the passions and arouse the lower instincts of man's nature. Thus the reader of such books imbibes erroneous ideas about the teaching and the discipline of the Church, and is taught to think lightly of moral delinquencies. The title is no guide to the contents of these writings, in fact it often misleads, and it is not until one has perused a considerable portion that one discovers them to be subversive of religion and morality.

Now, if the injunction is laid upon us to shun bad com-

panions, whose conversation and example have a most injurious influence, how much the more must we cast from us bad books, which are still more potent to work the ruin of the soul!

For although an unprincipled companion, by speaking deprecatingly of religion, relating a questionable anecdote, or giving bad counsel, is likely to cool your fervor and perhaps blunt your sense of modesty and propriety, yet circumstances may lessen the harm done. A few passing words may give rise to evil thoughts, but if the heart of the listener is firmly rooted in the love and practice of virtue, the impression will not be permanent, and good thoughts will soon dislodge the evil ones. But with objectionable reading it is otherwise; the books remain; the ungodly principles, the descriptions of wrong-doing may be read again and again, the volume is ever at hand to amuse an idle hour, to distract one's thoughts, and the poison of its contents is taken up in repeated doses into the system. Moreover, a girl who has been well brought up, even though she has fallen into sin, will possess an innate sense of decorum, which will restrain the tongue from too great license. With bad books it is not so; vice and irreligion are depicted in realistic colors, and the narrative is made so interesting and attractive, the descriptions are so good and the style so excellent, that the poison is eagerly swallowed from the honeyed cup, and it is with a smile of satisfaction that the reader receives the death-blow to modesty and devotion.

Once more. A bad companion, if too outspoken, only excites a feeling of repulsion, and makes her society disliked and shunned. But many who would not listen to evil discourse do not fear evil books; they think they will get no harm from them; curiosity prompts them to open them, and, fascinated by the novelty, they read on, unable to lay the book down, until, when the last page is turned, their mind has, to a great extent, assimilated the views

and opinions of the writer. Hence we see that bad books are even more prejudicial than bad companions, and on this account the reading of such books is strictly prohibited by the Church. The Council of Trent condemns all writings destructive of faith or morals, and St. Charles Borromeo, in his zeal for the glory of God and the good of souls, desired that parish priests should take them away out of the houses of Christians, and report to the bishops those of their parishioners who retained or read them. For they were well aware that as a disease once contracted pervades the whole system, so if the germs of error and immorality are once introduced among the faithful the contamination will spread far and fast.

But, you will perhaps say, we mean to do nothing wrong, we read for amusement and instruction.

Your intentions, my children, may be irreproachable, but meanwhile your faith is enfeebled, your moral sense blunted. Instruction derived from objectionable books is the reverse of desirable; what boon is that enlightenment which destroys innocence, the acquisition of that knowledge whereof you had far better be ignorant? The desire to enlighten your mind and enrich it with valuable knowledge is most praiseworthy, and I am the first to commend the wise maiden who, having fulfilled her duties, employs her leisure in useful reading. But is it from books that ought not to be seen in the hand of a well-brought-up girl that you are to acquire information and edification? Is the enlightenment of your mind, exclaims Tertullian, to come from the fire that scorches the heart? What is the instruction worth which is obtained from pages which corrupt the imagination, awaken the passions, fill the head with distorted ideas, and cause the word of God and the sacraments to be neglected? What matters purity of style compared with purity of heart? Blessed is ignorance if it guard you from such dangers;

better be remarked for the excellence of your life than for the elegance of your diction.

If, indeed, you wish for your mental improvement, there is no lack of books, the works of good authors, which, while they interest and instruct you, will tend to draw your mind from this world's vanities, will encourage you in the love of those virtues which belong to your state in life, and in striving to perfect yourself in them.

But, you may yet urge, we will be very cautious, and if we come upon anything improper, we need not read it.

Do not deceive yourselves, my children. You know that it is far easier not to open a book than, having begun to read it, to close it again. Besides, these modern writers know so well how to disguise error, to mask vice, to conceal the poison in a honeyed cup, that when once you have placed your lips to it, you will not have the courage to refuse yourself a second draught of the luscious beverage.

If you are truly desirous to keep your heart unstained and your conscience pure, be very careful what you read. Look upon a bad book as the worst enemy that can be admitted into your home; if you find one, follow the example of St. Aloysius, who happening to come across one of these pernicious publications, instantly committed it to the flames, and ran to wash his hands, as if he considered them defiled by the touch of anything so foul. To the fire then with such books, it is the only fit place for them, throw them at once into the flames. I will conclude in the words of St. Augustine: "The perusal of bad books teaches one to regard what is evil without disgust, to speak of it without shame, to practise it without scruple." May God and His blessed Mother, Mary Immaculate, preserve you from such a fate!

SERMON XLVIII.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND PARADISE.

PARADISE, my children, is the end and object of this our pilgrimage. It is the reward of all our sufferings, of all our labors. It is the end to which we look forward. The purpose of our life on earth is to serve God here and to enjoy Him hereafter in Paradise.

I desire to-day to raise your thoughts on the pinions of faith to your future country, and to speak to you of its glories. Amid the trials and dangers of this life, we need occasionally to lift up our hearts to the felicity that awaits us hereafter, to revive our courage and enable us to persevere on the strait and toilsome path of virtue.

St. Paul had the happiness, even during his lifetime, to be rapt to the third heaven; it was an ecstasy in which he was permitted, for one brief moment, to taste the bliss of Paradise. But of what he saw and heard he could not, would not, reveal anything; all he said was that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him. If an apostle spoke thus, one so learned in the things of God, one who had even been privileged to behold the joys to come, what can we poor mortals say on such a subject? It needs one of the denizens of the celestial country to speak of it, to understand it aright. We only know what we read about it in Holy Scripture, in the works of the Fathers and great theologians of the Church; what those fortunate souls tell us to whom is granted to enjoy a foretaste of eternal blessedness; and we are assured that the reality far surpasses any descrip-

tion that is given us, or any idea we may conceive of it. We only know that supreme felicity will inundate the soul when that day dawns for her which shall know no end, when she enters upon the joys that are eternal, when she is admitted into the realms of everlasting light and peace.

We will, however, with the help of God, endeavor to form some idea, although a faint and imperfect one, of the infinite delights reserved for the just in Paradise.

Among all nations, even the most unenlightened, we find the belief in Paradise; they may not call it by this name, but they figure to themselves a future state of felicity in accordance with their own more or less barbarous notions. Everywhere and in all ages the persuasion has existed that there is a sort of Valhalla, where the good, the great, the valiant, receive a reward and are made partakers of the happiness their deeds have merited. The descriptions that the Greeks and Romans have left of their conception of a future life are to a great extent akin to those of the Christian. Thus we see that the belief in Paradise existed before the Christian era, that it dates from the earliest ages, and prevailed among all people. It is a truth implanted in human nature, which cannot be denied without running counter to reason and common-sense. For, as the infidel Voltaire admitted, the antiquity and universality of a belief is a sure note of its truth.

The existence of Paradise is therefore an acknowleged fact. Every Christian is bound to believe in it; merely to question it would be a heresy, since it is taught as a dogma of faith. What does the little handbook of Christian doctrine, which is a compendium of all we ought to know, tell us on this point? It tells us that there is a just God who rewards the good; that we are in this world to know, love, and serve Him in this life, and to be happy with Him in the next; that it is to those who love and serve Him here below that God gives Paradise hereafter.

What, let us inquire, is this Paradise wherein we all believe so firmly; or rather, what is done in Paradise? Again the Catechism tells us: "The glory and happiness of heaven is to see, love, and enjoy God, with all good and no manner of evil, forever, to all eternity." We will expound this answer, beginning with the absence of evil.

In Paradise there is nothing evil. Sin is the first, the chiefest, the only real evil, because it is an offence against God, and deprives us of His grace. In Paradise there is not a trace of sin, not even a shadow of temptation. The time of our probation is ended; the souls of the redeemed are confirmed in grace, there is no more fear of offending God. Take heart, therefore, O you who are in constant dread of sinning, of displeasing God, thinking, and rightly thinking, that no worse calamity can befall you. In Paradise you will not have this cause of anxiety; the devil, the world, the flesh, will no longer war against you, they cannot enter there.

In Paradise there is no more ignorance. Ignorance is the cause of innumerable evils, it is one of the penalties of sin. In heaven our minds will be enlightened by the light of divine wisdom, and all doubt and error will be put to flight.

In Paradise there will be no more fears, no more troubles, no more scruples; all that now agitates the soul will there be put to rest.

In Paradise there will be no more sickness, no cold nor heat, no hunger nor thirst, no sorrow, no persecution, no death; all that afflicts us here below will then have passed away. How consoling is this thought for those who are ready to cry with St. Paul: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

But this is only the negative side. In Paradise we shall enjoy the presence of every sort of good; not material, transitory, earthly good, but that which is spiritual and eternal, and alone capable of satisfying the human heart, of

giving complete content to the powers of the soul and the senses of the body, so that the understanding, the will, the affections, will all be crowned with felicity. The intellect, enlightened and enlarged, will be capable of comprehending mysteries now far beyond its grasp; the heart, expanded and elevated, will be capable of the most intense enjoyment, and of sentiments of love and exaltation unknown here on earth.

The senses also will receive pure and supernatural satisfaction. Since in hell the damned will be tormented in their bodies, which were the instruments of sin, it stands to reason that the blessed in heaven will experience the full satisfaction of the senses which they held in check and mortified for the love of God. St. John speaks in the Apocalypse of the splendors of the heavenly Jerusalem and the exquisite melodies of the angelic choirs which enchant the eye and the ear; we know, moreover, that the body will no longer be a drag and a burden to the soul, for it will be endowed with four glorious prerogatives: agility, subtlety, impassibility, and beauty.

In Paradise there is every good, and all evil is excluded. What then is Paradise? Wherein does its bliss consist?

In Paradise we shall be at rest. When life's weary pilgrimage is ended, we shall rest for evermore. Labor and fatigue are a necessity of this world; necessary as a penance, necessary as a means of merit. He who does not work cannot claim wages; and heaven is not a reward given to the slothful. Courage, therefore, when you are oppressed beneath the burden of life, look up to heaven and say: "There is my true country, the land of eternal repose; God grant that I may attain to it."

In Paradise we shall be at peace. This world is a place of warfare; Our Lord tells us He came not to bring peace, but a sword. We must fight continually against the enemies of our salvation; not for a single moment are we at peace. Let not your heart fail you, O soldier of

Christ! even when you suffer persecution for justice' sake, He pronounces you blessed; fight for Him and with Him and victory will be yours and also the reward of victory.

In Paradise there will be no more foes, no more warfare; there will be peace, eternal peace.

In Paradise we shall enjoy perfect felicity. True happiness is not known in this world; it consists in the full and entire satisfaction of all the desires of the heart and mind. This is a thing impossible here below; for even those who possess all this world can give—beauty, riches, position—are not as much to be envied as they appear, there is always something lacking to their happiness.

In Paradise alone is fulness of joy; true, continual, everlasting bliss. *True* happiness, because it is holy and just; the reward of the valiant, bestowed by God in His infinite bounty and justice. *Continual* happiness, for it is always the same; the felicity of this world, if it does not come to an abrupt termination, soon palls on its possessor, or what he has appears worthless in comparison with what he wishes for. *Everlasting* happiness; it will never, never end, and this characteristic of eternity, which makes the horror and despair of the damned in hell, increases to an infinite extent the bliss of the redeemed, who unite their voices to those of the angels, and with them incessantly cry: "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts; Hosanna in the highest."

Since such are the joys of Paradise, well may we count blessed the poor, the suffering, the afflicted, since to them Our Lord promises an eternity of happiness in reward for the transient tribulations and miseries of this passing world. Let the thought of Paradise encourage us to suffer in patience, to bear privations without murmuring, to endure persecution with meekness, in hope of the immeasurable recompense in store for those who persevere unto the end.

To see God, to possess God, to enjoy God forever, this is the glory and felicity of Paradise. Holy Scripture assures us that we shall see Him face to face, that we shall know Him even as we are known by Him, that we shall enter into His infinite joy. We shall see Him, whom now we behold only by faith, in His infinity, immensity, and omnipotence; we shall comprehend His divine attributes, His wisdom, His sanctity, His beauty, His goodness. We shall possess Him, for we are told He will give Himself as the reward of the just, not for a few passing moments, but as an eternal and exceeding great reward. We shall enjoy Him; He is in Himself true, immense, boundless felicity; felicity of which our finite nature can form no conception, but of which our glorified nature will be capable. Furthermore, we shall see Jesus, our Redeemer, the most beautiful of the sons of men. We shall see Him whom we now behold hidden under the eucharistic veil seated on the right hand of the Father; who when on earth drew all hearts to Him. And if, when He was transfigured on Thabor, the entranced disciples wished to gaze forever on the wondrous sight, what will it be to contemplate His majesty in that city whereof He is Himself the light. And after Jesus there is Mary, herself the joy and glory of Paradise, the Queen of heaven, the Queen of angels, the Mother of God and our own Mother. How shall we rejoice to gaze on the beauty of her who is clothed with the sun, crowned with twelve stars! Happy will you be, my children, if you take a place among the virgins that surround her throne; doubtless for you who call yourselves her daughters a special place will be reserved near to Jesus and Mary. Let the thought of the joys and glory that await you, if you prove worthy of your great Mother, be ever before your mind; and animated by this hope, may you scorn the vanities of earth and press forward to the bliss of Paradise.

SERMON XLIX.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND CHRIST CRUCIFIED.

To-day we will go up to Calvary with Mary, our blessed Mother, and with her take our station at the foot of the cross. Let us gaze on Him who hangs thereon and study Him, for to know Jesus Christ and Him crucified, is, as St. Paul tells us, the most sublime knowledge, the knowledge which it imports us most to learn. "God forbid," he says, "that I should glory, save in the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ." In Christ crucified we have our Master and our Exemplar; the crucifix is a book written within and without, from which more is to be learned than from any other; the book which all, even the most unlearned, may read. You all, my children, have a crucifix, blessed for the hour of death; this you will hold in your hands, press to your lips, clasp to your heart in your last agony. Let your thoughts dwell continually with Christ crucified, learn to live, learn to die with the crucifix in your embrace, and what is of yet more consequence, in the embrace of the Crucified.

What, then, does the crucifix teach us? this is the question we propose to answer in the present conference.

Who is it who is crucified? A child of six years old can answer me. It is Our Lord Jesus Christ who died on the cross for our salvation. This brief answer comprises all that need be said; we will, however, seek to penetrate somewhat deeper into this mystery, acquaint ourselves with it more closely, that knowledge may give birth to love, and love lead to imitation.

The figure upon the cross is, therefore, none other than

Jesus, the Eternal Word, the Son of God, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, who became man for our sakes, was born of the virgin Mary, and after thirty-three years of life on earth suffered and died upon the cross. And the reason why He chose this form of death—the most ignominious, the most cruel, that human injustice and human barbarity could devise, one reserved for slaves and the lowest criminals—when a single word, a tear, a drop of blood would have sufficed to redeem us from the servitude of sin, is because man, having lost the sonship of God, had become the slave of the devil and rendered himself subject to death, the death of the soul and the death of the body. Wherefore Jesus who, to make satisfaction for man's transgressions, took upon Himself the form of a servant, chose to die the death of a slave—the death of the cross. Moreover, He desired that life should thence arise whence death had come; that as the devil had by means of a tree compassed the ruin of mankind, so the salvation of mankind should be established in the wood of the cross.

Look upon the Man-God, my children, stripped of His garments, His body one vast wound from head to foot, streaming with blood, His flesh torn, His head pierced with thorns, His hands transfixed with nails, abandoned by all, hanging between two thieves; cast yourselves at His feet, contemplate Him, study Him, and listen to the lessons your crucified God will teach you. "Go forth, daughters of Sion, see your King in the diadem wherewith His Mother [the Jewish synagogue] crowned Him in the day of His espousals."

Consider first what we learn from His sacred head. It is a lesson of humility. Humility is the foundation of all piety and perfection; it is a virtue that forbids us to carry our head haughtily; it bids us fix our eyes on the ground, in remembrance of our lowly origin. See how Christ's head is bowed down upon the cross; this is to

teach us to humble ourselves before God, for He is holy and we are sinners; He is omniscient and omnipotent, and we are ignorant and weak. He is our Master, and we are His servants; He is our Creator, and we are His creatures. And He who was equal to the Father in regard to His Godhead, acknowledged Himself to be inferior to Him as man, and though Himself sinless, He humbled Himself on account of the sins of mankind to be made like to us. Let us also learn of our crucified Lord humility towards our fellow-men. "If any man desire to be first," He said to the apostles, "he shall be last of all," and He, their Master, washed their feet. Let us be humble in heart, truly and sincerely humble, not in words only but in deeds; willing to bear humiliations without feelings of resentment; yielding to others, even when we think ourselves in the right, as Christ gave Himself into the hands of the executioners, to be nailed to the cross; bearing with others, knowing that others have to bear with us, while Christ, the innocent Lamb, prayed for His persecutors, never uttering a word of complaint; finally bearing all things in silence, even insults and slanders, remembering that it is said of Christ that when He was accused of many things; He answered nothing.

Not only is the head of Christ upon the cross bowed down, it wears a crown—a crown of thorns that pierce the flesh, that lacerate His temples, so that the blood covers His countenance and blinds His eyes. How much does this diadem, worn by the King of kings, teach us! The head is the noblest, the principal part of the body; it is the seat of the intellect; the thorns teach us that the powers of the mind and soul, whereby all the members are governed, must be mortified; and the disfigurement of Christ's sacred features teaches us not to boast of beauty, or make use of our eyes or lips as the instruments of pride or vanity.

Contemplate next the hands and feet of the Crucified;

they are torn and bleeding, transfixed with cruel nails, causing Him inexpressible torture. It is said that when the nail had been driven into the left hand, the right arm had to be stretched so forcibly to reach the hole prepared for the other nail, that the bones were dislocated. Christ endured this martyrdom to expiate man's abuse of the liberty God gave him, the sinful acts of which mankind is guilty.

Freedom is the highest, the greatest gift of Heaven; the understanding is given us to discern between good and evil, the will to make choice of one or the other. Sadly indeed is this freedom abused in the present day; liberty, liberty, liberty! is the universal cry—liberty too often employed to break the laws of God, to throw off the restraint of legitimate authority. And who can tell the number of evil acts whereof our hands and feet have been the instruments, the blind instruments, guided by the mind and will? How often our feet have carried us into occasions of danger! How often have our hands, that ought to be lifted up in prayer or busied with good works, been stretched out to do wrong! Remember the wounds of Our Lord's sacred feet and hands and you will be less concerned for your own ease and comfort, less eager to adorn your person, less reluctant to undertake anything for others that involves exertion and fatigue.

Our Lord desired that no portion of His sacred body should be excluded from sharing in His passion; consequently He willed that his heart should also receive a wound. The lance of Longinus passed through His side, and pierced His heart, so that there came out blood and water. This mystic water and blood the Fathers declare to be symbolical of two sacraments: Baptism, the most indispensable, and the Holy Eucharist, the most excellent of the sacraments. How great the mystery of this wound, inflicted after death! Commentators tell us it is to signify how grievous are the sins of Christians, of those who

know that He has redeemed them by His death, and how deeply they wound the heart of Jesus! Again it is said that it was to atone for sins of hatred and vengeance, of disorderly and impure love, which, when once they take possession of the heart, are with difficulty dislodged. The heart is made for love, it is true, my children; beware lest you bestow your affections on unworthy objects; give the whole love of your heart to that heart which loved you so much, the sweet heart of Jesus. Let Him say that you have wounded His heart, but let it be by love, not by infidelity or neglect.

Christ upon the cross also teaches us to pardon offences. See Him there in His agony, while the executioners divide His garments among them, the scribes and Pharisees mock and insult Him. The first word that His lips utter is a prayer for their pardon: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." The charity taught us by our divine Lord extends to all, even to our enemies, to those who injure us; it teaches us not only to forgive them ourselves, but to pray God to pardon them. The world scoffs at this, but it is in reality the most generous act we can perform, the one most acceptable to God, and He will show to us the mercy that we show to others.

Let us look once more at Christ crucified. He is stripped and denuded of His garments. Why does the Holy of holies submit to such ignominy, expose Himself to the vulgar gaze of a rude multitude? It is to repair the fault of our first parents, who, when they lost original innocence and grace, awoke to a knowledge of their nakedness and to a sense of shame; it is to restore us to grace, to preserve us from eternal confusion, that He endures this ignominy.

Furthermore, the destitution of Christ upon the cross appears to me to symbolize the destitution of so many poor, who have scarce clothes to cover them, while the rich have them in superfluity Learn, my children, not to

attach undue importance to the quality and quantity of your apparel; it is sin that renders our clothes necessary, let them not become instruments of sin, by tempting you to vanity, display, and the desire of attracting notice and admiration. Dress yourself simply and suitably; and, if possible, clothe some one poorer that yourself.

Such are the lessons I desire you to learn from your crucifix. There are others, many others, and deeper ones, which I could indicate to you did time permit; I will only ask you frequently to take Christ crucified as the subject of your meditations. "Blessed," exclaimed St. Augustine, "is he who is versed in the science of Christ crucified; unhappy he who is a stranger to it."

Remember that the day will come when human help will avail you nothing, and you will have to pass through the last dread struggle alone, with your crucifix in your hand. What consolation for you in that supreme moment to have given your whole heart, your whole soul, to Christ crucified!

SERMON L.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND DEVOTION TO THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN.

It would indeed be a failure in duty on my part, Children of Mary, were I to neglect to speak to you of your blessed Mother, Mary Immaculate. I have, it is true, continually, in the course of these instructions, set her before you as your model, exhorted you to imitate her virtues; yet it is only fitting that at least one conference should be entirely dedicated to proclaiming her greatness and the devotion which you, her daughters, specially owe to her.

Who and what is Mary? She is the fairest, the most adorable of God's creatures. She is the daughter of the Most Holy Trinity, incomparable in her dignity, her privileges, and her prerogatives; she is blessed among women; the nearest to God of all created beings. She is the Mother of God, and at the same time the Mother of mankind, so that all who profess devotion to her attain by her and in her to the sonship of God. And of all the great human family, Mary looks with special complacency on you who call yourselves by her name, and have pledged yourselves to love her with more than ordinary affection. As Our Lord on one occasion asked St. Peter three times whether he loved Him more that the others, and the apostle answering said: "Lord, thou knowest that I love thee," so the Blessed Virgin addressed to you the same question on the day when you were enrolled in this confraternity: "My child, lovest thou me more than those my other children?" And you replied: "My Mother, thou

knowest that I love thee; henceforth, I take thee alone for my beloved Mother, and I will be thy loving daughter."

Hence it follows that you, beyond all others, ought to cherish a deeper, more pure, more perfect devotion to our blessed Lady. In order to enable you to do this, I propose to explain to you the claim she has to your special veneration, and your duties in regard to her.

The word devotion, strictly speaking, signifies a true, effectual, practical desire to do all that appertains to the service of God. Whence it appears that devotion, properly so called, ought to be paid to the Most High alone, to whom, as the first beginning and final end of all things, all honor and glory belong of right from all creatures forever and ever. In a somewhat wider sense, however, we both may and ought to pay devotion to the saints and, above all, to Our Lady, the Queen of saints. For the supreme veneration we pay to God does not prohibit us from honoring those of His creatures whom He vouchsafed Himself to honor by endowing them with supernatural grace, lavishing upon them signal favors; it does not prohibit us from reverencing and admiring them, and having recourse to the intercession of those privileged beings who have known how to make use of the gifts bestowed on them for the end for which they were given. Thus we venerate the saints and, above all others, Mary most holy with sentiments of admiration and confidence; we pay them a homage subordinate to and dependent on the homage we pay to God.

Devotion to our blessed Lady is just and right, since she was exalted by God above every other creature, above the angels of heaven, and chosen by Him to be none other than the Mother of the Son of God. Our devotion to her is also just, because she is our Mother, our spiritual, our true Mother; more to us than our earthly mother; she is the Mother of all mankind, being designated as such by Our Lord Himself on Mount Calvary.

Now, if we consider what are the principal duties of a mother towards her children, we shall see how fully and perfectly Mary performs these duties in our regard, how truly she is our Mother, and how strong are the claims she has on our devotion.

The first and most natural duty of a mother is to love her children. This is so much a matter of course, that maternal love is taken as the type of the strongest, deepest, most generous affection. And as love does not content itself with feelings and words, but takes a practical shape, we see mothers suffering all manner of pains and privations, sacrificing their very lives for the sake of their offspring, out of the abundance of their love for them.

In this respect Mary is indeed a model of maternal love. Who can estimate aright her dolors, the anguish she endured, not physical anguish, like Our Lord's, but anguish of heart and soul? St. Anselm says that all the tortures inflicted on the martyrs were nothing in comparison with the sorrows of Our Lady. And these sorrows were endured for our sakes, for our salvation, that we might be born again to the life of grace.

It is also the duty of a mother to watch over her children, to supply their wants, to provide to the utmost of her power for their health, their welfare, their happiness, both temporal and spiritual. This our blessed Lady does for us, and in a manner superior to that of any earthly mother, inasmuch as her love is more pure and perfect, her power of benefiting us is greater and more extensive. She is the dispenser of God's graces to us, the all-powerful queen, for the favors God bestows on us in virtue of His own power, Mary bestows in virtue of the power communicated to her. St. Anselm does not hesitate to affirm that we stand more chance of obtaining our requests, if we proffer them to Mary rather than to God; because whereas God is mercy and justice, Mary is

all mercy. Who can enumerate the spiritual favors we receive from our immaculate Mother? How many souls, grown cold and indifferent, have been kindled to fresh ardor, how many wanderers from the right way have been brought back to the fold by her sweet voice? Have not all of us experienced her loving care, aiding us to surmount temptation, rescuing us from danger, inciting us to advance in virtue?

And as the mother intercedes on behalf of her child with the father, when the latter is justly angered against him, so Mary pleads with God to avert His wrath from sinners. Many a one who, like the Prodigal Son, has left his heavenly Father's house for the follies and degrading pleasures of the world, finding himself in misery and isolation, is encouraged to return to the God whom he has offended by the thought of Mary, his Mother, the Refuge of sinners. And she has invited him lovingly, welcomed him gladly, led him to the feet of Jesus to confess his transgressions, and, sheltering him with her mantle, obtained pardon for the penitent.

If the mother is always ready to help her children in their needs, she redoubles her tender care when their last hour draws nigh. Death is terrible for all, but what an alleviation to behold at one's side a beloved mother to soothe and cheer, to give such relief to her dying child as her love can suggest. Now what the earthly mother does for her child, Mary does in a far greater measure for her spiritual children. How enviable are the deathbeds of the devoted servants of Mary, how peaceful and serene! For she is there to comfort and assist, in some instances visibly present, to receive in her arms the departing soul. Happy, indeed, are those who place themselves under her protection, she will not fail to succor them in that supreme moment. If we are truly devout to Mary, we need have no alarm about our last hour.

What shall we say of the temporal graces and favors

Mary bestows on her clients? A hymn of praise and grateful thanksgiving ascends to her on all sides; we read of victories gained, of pestilence stayed, of cities saved, of whole nations delivered through her interposition. See the churches raised in her honor, the sanctuaries dedicated to her; the wondrous cures which have been worked and are daily worked by the waters from her fountain. Well may the Church invoke her as the Mother of divine grace, the consolation of the afflicted, the help of Christians; for she is a true Mother, a compassionate Mother, a powerful Mother, and from her throne in heaven where she sits as a Queen by Jesus' side, she is ever ready to come to the aid of suffering humanity.

This being so, what are our duties in regard to our blessed Lady? Those of children towards their parents: love, respect, obedience, and help.

One would imagine that there was no necessity for a command to love the parent to whom one owes one's existence, by whom one has been brought up at the cost of much trouble and exertion. Alas! so sad is the effect of original sin, that children when grown up too often treat their parents with ingratitude. Let this never be said of you, my children, and as you cherish your earthly mother, entertain a warm affection for your heavenly Mother. Let your thoughts turn towards her continually, raise your heart to her in loving colloquies, tell her how fondly you love her; meditate on her signal virtues, congratulate her on her greatness, compassionate her in her dolors. Such signs of affection are very pleasing to Mary, and amply does she repay them.

It is the duty of a child also to respect her mother, to feel towards her that mingled fear and love which is inspired within us by the virtues, the perfections, the dignity of a mother. Earthly parents have a right to the respect of their children, but they are not always worthy of it. Our blessed Lady, on the contrary, merits all our

esteem, our highest respect after God, because in her all perfections and virtues possible in a human creature meet, and in their highest degree; this renders her so pleasing to God, that He enriches her with extraordinary prerogatives. Hence the veneration paid to her by the whole Church, the altars raised in her honor, the respect paid to her images, the joy and grandeur wherewith her feasts are celebrated.

Furthermore, a good child is bound to obey her mother promptly and willingly in all she commands, unless it involves sin. And not only does she obey her behests, she anticipates her mother's wishes in order that she may fulfil them. Such is the obedience a Child of Mary owes to her celestial Mother. You know what Mary enjoins on you: to study and imitate her example.

Imitation is an exercise of obedience, nay more, it is essential to true devotion, for without it devotion is empty and sterile. Imitation is a proof of love, respect, and obedience; and Mary Immaculate desires that you should imitate her, she desires to see herself reflected in you, as the features of earthly parents are reproduced in their offspring. "Learn," says St. Ambrose to the young women of his day, "to regulate your conduct according to the example of Mary's virtue and sanctity."

The last duty of which we will speak that a child owes her parent is that of helping her in time of need, of protecting and providing for her. This, you will say, is easy enough towards an earthly parent, a poor, frail woman, who needs support and succor in her declining years, but what can we do for the Mother of God, what does she want of us, enjoying as she does eternal felicity in heaven?

It is true that in a certain sense Mary has need of naught; nothing can eclipse or diminish the brightness of her glory. Yet, just as God, the Creator and Lord of all, eternally happy and self-sufficient, requires from us

our heartfelt love and homage, so, though Mary needs it not, it is just that we should offer her the external marks of our affection and devotion, and she is graciously pleased to accept them at our hands. You can also do something for our blessed Lady by spreading devotion to her, by defending it when it is scoffed at by the unbelieving world, by gaining others to her service by your words and good example; you can, if you are called to the married state, instil into your children from their infancy the love of this great Queen.

I have already dwelt too long on this delightful theme, and will only in conclusion express regret that my words should be so weak, so unworthy to utter the praise of her who alone found favor with God, who is blessed among women, full of grace. Let your piety supply my deficiencies; show yourselves true Children of Mary by continually increasing in love and devotion towards her; love will teach you a thousand ways whereby to honor her to the utmost of your power. Prove by your deeds that you regard her as your Mother, and doubt not that she will act towards you the part of a mother; that she will watch over, help, protect you unto your life's end.

SERMON LI.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND DEVOTION TO OUR GUARDIAN ANGEL.

After devotion to the Blessed Virgin there is none which it is of more importance for the Child of Mary to practise than devotion to her angel guardian. Not only is it in accordance with the spirit of the Church to give prominence to this devotion, for the angels are honored above the other denizens of the celestial courts, and invoked most after the Queen of heaven, but it is most suitable for the Christian maiden who needs the custody and care of the angels to preserve her purity unstained, to defend her against the assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Would that you knew how your angel guardian loves this fair virtue of piety! Would that you knew how valuable a friend you have in him, how faithful and disinterested is the love he bears you!

Yet tell me, in what account do you hold this celestial companion? Do you walk in his presence, remembering that he is ever at your side, that he sees your every action, even the most insignificant? Do you show him gratitude, fidelity, confidence, respect, listening to his suggestions, paying him every day some tribute of esteem and love? I am half afraid that your devotion to your angel guardian is not what it should be, that it does not correspond to his watchful care, and therefore I intend to-day to rouse you from your indifference and remind you who this exalted spirit is whom God gives to each one of us for the invisible companion of our whole life

how much he does for us, and how great is the gratitude we owe him.

The angels are noble and lofty beings, created by God's omnipotent hand. They are pure spirits whose dwelling is in heaven, where they see and enjoy God, whom they constantly adore, and in whom they find infinite satisfaction. Endowed with all the most splendid gifts, so wondrous in their beauty that the light of a thousand suns focused into one point would not equal the brilliance of their splendor; their knowledge is so vast that the wisdom of Solomon is ignorance compared to it; their agility is so great that they traverse space more swiftly than thought can travel. Imagine all that is most bright and beautiful among the created beings of the universe, add to this the most exalted sanctity, the intensest love, the most spotless purity, and you will have some idea of what the angels are.

The number of the angels cannot be told, but the prophet Daniel, who saw them around the throne of God, declared that there were myriads and myriads of them. St. John says the same, and Job exclaims: "Is there any numbering of His soldiers?" We know one of their principal offices is to act as the messengers and ambassadors of the Most High, and for this reason they are depicted with wings, to denote the promptitude wherewith they execute His commands.

Now God who is ever rich in mercy, who cares for the least and most insignificant of His creatures, has appointed one of these princes of the celestial courts to watch over each of us exiles in this valley of tears, to smooth our path and defend us on the journey of life from the cradle to the grave. How kind and affectionate is his care for all that concerns his charge; innumerable are the ways in which he assists him, innumerable the services he renders him. In fact, this good angel lends us most effectual help in the great affair for which we are placed

in the world, the salvation of our soul. The world is full of evil spirits, who constantly incite us to all manner of sin; there is no one who is not frequently and fiercely tempted. Now as the Archangel Raphael guided the young Tobias on his journey from Ninive to Rages, rescued him from the monstrous fish, found a useful medicine for him to avert the danger threatening him, and procured for him an excellent spouse, so our angel guardian protects us against the assaults of evil spirits, and by the potent graces that he obtains for us from Heaven he helps us to overcome the temptations of every kind whereby our enemies seek to compass our ruin, and renders futile their diabolical wiles. What would become of us, were the spirits of hell not held in check by our dear guardian angel!

With untiring assiduity this good angel accompanies us everywhere; when we lie down to rest, he extends over us his sheltering wings to defend us from nocturnal alarms, and when day again dawns, he bids us rise from our couch and apply ourselves anew to our work. He reminds us to sanctify all our actions and render them meritorious; he consoles us in our afflictions by the hope of eternal bliss. Nay more, he presents to Almighty God our prayers and our good works: "When thou didst pray with tears," Raphael said to Tobias, "and didst bury the dead, and didst leave thy dinner and hide the dead by day in thine house, and bury them by night, I offered thy prayer to the Lord." At no time, by night or day, does he leave us; like a watchful sentinel, he is ever at our side; and even if we love him not, and heed him not, he does not discontinue his loving care.

St. Cyril tells us that our guardian angel acts towards us the part of a zealous teacher, dispelling error from our minds. St. Bernard assures us that he fulfils the office of a kind admonisher, urging us to the practice of piety; St. Ambrose says our good angel makes himself our protec-

tor, to ward off from us the attacks of those who would injure us; and were he not thus to defend us, it would be impossible for us to escape for one moment from the snares of our hellish foes. Finally, we have the express declaration from the lips of King David, that God has given His angels charge over us, to keep us in all our ways.

And if such is the care he takes of us in our lifetime, what, think you, will he not do for us at the hour of death? That hour is oftentimes the hour of cruellest dereliction: friends and relatives either leave us or are impotent to help us. But in this hour of anguish, our angel guardian does not forsake us. He stands a faithful companion beside our dying bed, knowing that to be the moment when the devil redoubles his efforts; when all hell combines to drag the unhappy soul down to perdition. He will render her the most powerful assistance. He will dispel the alarm caused by apprehension of the future; he will soothe the mind, agitated by the remembrance of past sins; he will inspire the heart with confidence in the divine mercy. He will see that we are fortified by the presence of God's ministers, and by the reception of the last rites of the Church; he will not leave us until our soul, freed from the body, stands before her judge. He will then undertake our defence, he will plead our cause, he will visit us in purgatory and obtain for us the suffrages of the faithful, never resting until by his unremitting efforts, we are admitted into our heavenly country.

Now when the young Tobias, on his return from Rages, whither he had journeyed under the escort of the Archangel Raphael in human form, recounted to his aged father the long series of benefits conferred on him by his companion, he said: "Father, what wages shall we give him, or what can be worthy of his benefits?" I may address to you the same question, asking you what you

give to your angel guardian in return for his loving care of you?

St. Bernard tells us that our duty towards this faithful friend is a threefold one: to show respect for his presence, to entertain for him a true affection, and to place the most unbounded confidence in him.

First, we ought to show respect for his presence. Never should we venture to do anything which we would not do in the presence of a fellow-creature, and this out of reverence for our unseen companion, who never leaves us by day or night. No act, no thought, is hidden from him; he is, besides, as we have already said, an exalted prince of the heavenly courts, more noble, more powerful than any earthly potentate. He is so pure, so holy, that the slightest shadow of sin is abhorrent to him. Beware, then, lest you forget the reverence you owe to this great spirit by sinning in his presence; for as the chief object of all his loving care is that God should be served and adored, so nothing grieves him more than that God should be offended or forgotten.

Secondly, we ought to entertain for him a sincere affection. How much he loves us! No father could love his son more fondly. Even when we fall into sin, he does not withdraw his affection from us, nor cease to befriend us. He takes to heart all our interests, not only spiritual, but temporal also, provided the latter do not clash with the former. Considering what immense obligations we are under to him, we should be the most ungrateful of beings did we not cherish sentiments of the deepest affection towards him. And these sentiments of love and gratitude must not be sterile, for love manifests itself in deeds. It must show itself in prompt obedience to his commands, by not allowing a day to pass without offering him thanks for his kind solicitude on our behalf, by acting on his inspiration, by avoiding occasions of sin, by bearing patiently rebukes, insults, and crosses, and by

mortifying our passions. Finally, by showing our appreciation of his unequalled charity, corresponding to his efforts for our welfare here below, and his desire that we may be his companions forever in Paradise.

Lastly, we must place in him unbounded confidence. How can we do otherwise, when we see that nothing can rival his care for us? The care of the tenderest mother falls short of that which he lavishes upon as. "What need we fear," exclaims St. Bernard, "while we are under such powerful protection? Our guardians cannot be overcome, they cannot be deceived, much less can they deceive us. They are faithful, prudent, powerful; what cause have we for apprehension? Let us follow their guidance, keep closely united to them, and thus we shall live under the defence of the Most High. Oh! would that you knew how powerful a protector is your angel guardian. It is recorded in the annals of the early Christians, that many a time the angel guardian appeared in visible shape to preserve the Christian virgins from the violence of pagan libertines."

Let me urge upon you, therefore, my children, to have a great devotion to the angel to whose charge Providence has specially committed you. Invoke him every day, every morning, and every night, and through him God will pour out upon you copious blessings. Call upon him when you are in doubt, and he will give you counsel and encouragement and wisdom. Call upon him amid the crosses and afflictions of life, and he will cause serene and tranquil days to follow upon dark and stormy seasons. Call upon him when the world, the flesh, and the devil, those terrible foes, seek to seduce you by their glittering pleasures; he will keep you from all harm. In a word, have recourse to him in every need, in every trouble, and you will find in him a mighty champion who will rescue you from all danger; an angel of light, before whom all darkness will fly. Like the fiery cloud that

guided the Israelites through the desert, he will lead you safely through the perilous journey of life ; he will bring you happily to the land of eternal blessedness towards which your thoughts, your aspirations ought always to be directed.

SERMON LII.

THE CHILD OF MARY AND ST. AGNES.

ON the 21st of January, in the year 304, a Christian virgin, of angelic purity and heroic courage, winged her flight to heaven, bearing in her hand the lily of chastity and the palm of martyrdom. Sixteen centuries have elapsed since then, yet the Catholic Church throughout the world celebrates the feast of this simple maiden; and you, Children of Mary, honor her memory with a special tribute of reverence and admiration, since she is one of the principal patrons of your association. We speak of the illustrious virgin and martyr St. Agnes, that fragrant flower of Catholicism, whose perfume pervades the whole of Christendom, the brightness of whose glory is undimmed by the course of ages; in whom, as in a spotless mirror, the divine beauty is reflected, whose holy life and valiant death, endured for the preservation of her virginal chastity, renders her one of the loveliest and the most attractive personages in the annals of the Church's saints. This angelic maiden is proposed to you as your model, after the virgin Mother of God, whom she so closely resembled in the purity of her soul, the fervor of her charity, her sublime spirit of sacrifice.

To-day I propose to pronounce the panegyric of your glorious patroness, reminding you of the various facts concerning her which history and tradition have handed down to us. And if in St. Agnes you find an object of admiration, you will also behold in her an example that you will feel strongly stirred up to imitate.

It was towards the close of the third century of the

Christian era, one remarkable in the records of the Church for the violence of the persecution waged against it, and in the great city of Rome, unrivalled at that period for its vice and luxury, that Agnes was born. The name of her parents is not known; tradition says they were of high rank and very wealthy. Being followers of the faith of Christ, they took care that their daughter should from her infancy be taught the divine doctrines of the Gospel.

From the time of her baptism, it appears that the child gave promise of what she was to become. As soon as she attained the gift of reason, she conceived the tenderest love for the spotless Lamb of God. This was less the result of the good teaching of her parents than the infused gifts of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ became the object of her most fervent, her all-absorbing affection; her innocent heart, fresh and fair as a flower, advanced rapidly in the practice of the Christian virtues.

The purity of this chaste maiden was all the more striking, when we consider the corrupt atmosphere in which she lived; for in pagan Rome deeds of which we should blush to speak were committed without shame; nay, immorality and profligacy were the very breath of ordinary society.

But amid these evil surroundings Agnes grew up like a spotless lily in the midst of weeds. Born in the luxury and comfort of a patrician home, the heiress of an immense fortune, endowed with rare mental gifts and great physical beauty, she could have commanded the most brilliant future. Yet she esteemed her virginal chastity above all else, and consecrated herself to God by vow, resolving to seek in heaven joys purer and choicer than any earth can afford. After this act of consecration, Agnes' one thought was to live exclusively for her Beloved; her one aspiration a strong and generous desire to belong solely to God, whose supreme majesty she adored; and under the influence of celestial graces she

became more firmly rooted in faith, preserving both body and soul immaculate like a flower of Paradise upon earth.

Meanwhile, the years of childhood came to an end, and at the age of thirteen, Agnes, in the full bloom of her youthful beauty—a beauty enhanced by the grace of Christian modesty—attracted the attention of several rich patrician youths, who became suitors for her hand. Among others, one day, came Proculus, the son of Sempronius, the prefect of Rome: he saw her, and was so fascinated by her, that he determined she should be his bride. The only son of a noble and opulent family, handsome in person, what more could be desired that he did not offer? His father, moreover, approved highly of his choice, and a formal proposal of marriage was made to Agnes' parents. Any other girl would have been overjoyed at the prospect, for Proculus was greatly admired in Roman society. But Agnes, enamoured of virginal chastity, closed her heart to earthly love, and courteously declined both the offer and the rich presents that accompanied it.

This unexpected repulse only inflamed Proculus' passion the more; in the hope of gaining her consent, he decided to speak to her himself. One autumn evening, when Agnes, accompanied by a servant, was returning from school, she was suddenly accosted by a young man, well dressed and of most gentleman-like demeanor, who told her how madly he loved her, and entreated her to marry him. Agnes was somewhat agitated at first, but, trained in the school of the martyrs, who in that period of persecution manifested such heroic constancy to the faith of Christ, she quickly recovered her serenity, and refused to listen to the torrent of persuasive words which flowed from the young man's lips. "Away," she cried, "O stone of scandal; my heart is engaged to another Lover. He is of nobler birth, of greater wealth, more fair to behold than thou; His voice is sweeter to my ear. He has a

virgin for His Mother, and God Himself is His Father. All the angels are subject to Him; His glory surpasses that of sun and moon; at His word the sick are healed, the dead raised to life. He has given me a necklace of costly gems, and placed in my ears pearls of inestimable value. Such is my divine Spouse; never will I break faith with Him." So saying, she turned her back upon the tempter and hastened on her homeward way.

And now a time of terrible trial began for Agnes. Proculus (for he it was), infuriated at the treatment he had received, swore to revenge himself; and having gathered from what Agnes said that she was a Christian, he denounced her as such to his father.

The persecution under Diocletian was then at its height; the imperial officers, the pagan priests, the superstitious populace, all combined in the endeavor to exterminate the religion of Christ from the face of the earth. The cry, *Christianos ad leones*, resounded through the empire; no torture was too barbarous, no death too horrible, for those who belonged to the hated sect. Sempronius, on hearing that Agnes was a Christian, thought he had an excellent means of bending her to his will; or, if she still proved obstinate, of taking signal vengeance. He caused her to be arrested and brought before him. He received her, surrounded by all the pomp of his official dignity, and with feigned kindness, with the most flattering persuasions, he endeavored to overcome her constancy, depicting in glowing colors his son's devoted attachment, the splendors of the nuptials, the brilliant future awaiting the youthful spouses. All was in vain: the pleasures, grandeurs, honors promised her had no attraction for Agnes; having chosen Christ as the only object of her love, she feared nothing, desired nothing more on earth. Strong in her holy resolution, she returned a smiling but firm refusal to all the proposals made her. Finding she was not to be won by gentle measures, Sem-

pronius resorted to menaces. He ordered her to be bound, and all manner of instruments of torture were exhibited to her. But all his threats were futile: Agnes remained steadfast as a rock.

The Prefect was staggered by this unlooked-for resistance. He felt that having once entered upon the matter, he must needs go all lengths. Flattering himself that the constancy of the young girl would give way in prospect of a fate worse than death, he ordered her to be taken to a house of evil repute and abandoned to the mercy of the profligate. But even then Agnes never wavered. "Know," she said to the Prefect, "that Christ is too jealous of the chastity of His spouses to allow it to be violated. He Himself is their guardian and defender."

So in fact it proved. Agnes, exposed as a defenceless lamb among wolves, was miraculously protected by her golden hair, which, enveloping her from head to foot like a mantle, emitted a singular refulgence, so that no man ventured to approach her. And when Proculus came, hoping to find her in his power, the angel of God smote him and he fell dead on the spot. The news of this tragic occurrence spread through Rome like wildfire; Sempronius, beholding his son a corpse, rent his garments in despair; until Agnes, compassionating the grief of the unhappy father, prayed God that for the glory of her celestial Spouse the young man might be restored to life. And behold! animation returned to the lifeless body; Proculus stood up and loudly confessed the God of the Christians to be the only true God, denouncing the false deities of the pagans. Sempronius, out of gratitude to Agnes, desired to save her; he was moreover convinced of her supernatural virtue; but, fearing the people, he timidly withdrew, leaving her to be dealt with by his subordinate, Aspasius.

Called upon by this new judge to offer sacrifice to the gods, Agnes boldly replied that he might, if he chose,

put her to torture and to death, as she was ready to suffer all things for the love of Christ. Accordingly a huge fire was kindled in the circus, and the brutal judge sentenced Agnes to be cast into the devouring flames. But human malice is powerless in presence of Divine Omnipotence; the same might that kept the three Hebrew children unharmed in the Babylonian furnace, restrained the flames from touching Agnes, so that she, like them, knelt and praised God in the midst of the fire. This new miracle called forth a fresh outburst of rage on the part of the populace, and the judge ordered Agnes to be beheaded. Calmly kneeling upon the ground, with words of prayer upon her lips, she offered her neck to the executioner; the blow fell, and the angels carried her fair soul upward to the embrace of her heavenly Spouse.

The remains of this youthful martyr were carefully preserved by the Christians, and interred with great reverence in a vault in the grounds of a villa belonging to the family, without the Nomentana gate. A magnificent basilica was afterwards raised upon the spot by the piety of the Emperor Constantine. And now, after sixteen centuries, her relics still exhale the odor of sanctity, and serve to teach Christian maidens what esteem they ought to have for the world and the things of the world in comparison with the rewards reserved for the true spouses of the immaculate Lamb.

Keep your eyes fixed, then, O my children, upon Agnes; upon her who, at the age of thirteen years, by her extraordinary purity and fortitude, merited the twofold crown of a virgin and a martyr, and learn of her to love these two Christian virtues. Love purity; it is the fairest jewel a maiden can wear, the one that makes her most like to the angels, which unites her most closely to her divine Lord. Love fortitude; you see a girl of scarce thirteen years despising all profane love, pleasures, riches, splendors; you see her confronting fire and sword,

nay, death itself, for the sake of preserving intact her chastity and her faith. Let this grand example of fortitude inspire you to exhibit a similar steadfast and generous spirit, to reject all attempts to lead you astray, to rise superior to mockery and threats, and to work out your salvation with invincible constancy and magnanimity, contemning that terrible adversary of the pious and devout life, human respect.

Happy you who cherish and cultivate these two grand virtues, purity and fortitude! You are true Children of Mary, true imitators of St. Agnes. A few years passed in the practice of these virtues purchased for your illustrious patroness one of the choicest crowns of eternal glory; and you, when this fleeting world is done, will pass from struggle to victory, from labor to rest, from earth to heaven.

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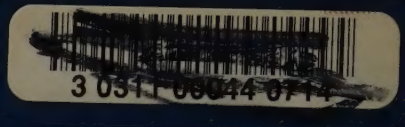
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